A
Background
to
The Novel in the West Indies

by
Kenneth Ramchand, M.A.

Thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the University of Edinburgh
in the Faculty of Arts

March, 1968

Preface

This study begins with a descriptive introduction (pp. 6-19) after which a summary is incorporated; this seems to be a convenient way of making the summary meaningful.

References to texts are to first editions, and place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

I must record my gratitude for assistance of various kinds: to Edinburgh University which encouraged the topic when it was not yet a fashionable one, and which provided necessary funds at the beginning; to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom; to the National Library of Scotland and to the British Museum.

Mr. K. E. Ingram of the University of the West Indies Library answered queries himself and secured further assistance from the Institute of Jamaica; and the Library of the University of Guyana provided invaluable material.

To colleagues at Edinburgh University I am indebted in general. From Paul Edwards in particular I have had supervision and friendship. Finally, my wife put up with much while these pages were being written, and then listened to them to good purpose.

Contents

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The concern in this study is with prose fiction, mainly novels, written by people who were born or who grew up in the West Indies - the formerly British islands in the Caribbean Sea and the South American mainland territory, Guyana.[1] The literary works to be approached usually have a West Indian setting and contain fictional characters and situations whose social correlates are immediately recognisable as West Indian. The books have all been written in the twentieth century; and their native West Indian authors include descendants of Europeans, descendants of African slaves, descendants of indentured labourers from India, and various mixtures from these. Thus formally, to begin with, this body of fiction can be distinguished from other works written in English and drawing upon West Indian raw material.

For although there is a long and still extant tradition of liberal and exotic writing in English about the Negro and about the West Indies[2], the earliest known work of West Indian prose fiction as defined above appeared in 1903. This was Tom Redcam's[3] Becka's Buckra Baby which was published in Jamaica as number 1 of 'The All Jamaica Library'. Between 1903 and June 1967, at least 162 works of fiction have been produced by fifty-six writers from six West Indian territories.[4] It was in order to emphasise the sharp increase in the number of West Indian novels after the Second World War, not out of ignorance, that a leading West Indian novelist wrote in 1960: "The West Indian novel, by which I mean the novel written by the West Indian

---

[1] Formerly British Guiana.

[2] In the different 'kinds', andsometimes by ex-slaves like Olaudah Equiano (1748-1801) whose autobiography appeared in 1789. Information relating to the pre-twentieth century writings of West Indian interest is to be found in: Wylie Sypher Guinea's Captive Kings (University of North Carolina Press, 1942); Eldred Jones Othello's Countrymen (1965); and N. Verrie McCullough The Negro in English Literature (1962). The first two are indispensable.

[3] 'Tom Redcam' was the pseudonym of the White Jamaican, Thomas H. MacDermot (1870-1933). The familiar literary name will be used as far as possible throughout.

[4] See Appendix One for a full bibliography with authors in alphabetical order. In Appendix Two a year by year bibliography is provided with a key indicating places of first publication.

about the West Indian reality is hardly twenty years old."[5] The literary activity in the islands between 1903 and 1950 is of peculiar significance, and several important works were published in the period. But if one of the aims of this study is to interpret these years and establish the continuity of West Indian prose, it would be a mistake not to give due prominence to the fact that 125 of the works listed in the bibliography were published between 1950 and 1967. Literary criticism has to cope with a situation in which most of the writers are still alive, their works not yet completed. Matters are even more complicated than that.

"Living in a borrowed culture," urges the least propagandist of writers from the islands, "the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands."[6] From Becka's Buckra Baby (1903) to Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1966), West Indian writers have expressed the social and economic deprivation of the Black majority. Edgar Mittelholzer's A Morning at the Office (1950) illustrates another typical feature in West Indian writing: the work expresses the race and colour stratifications of West Indian society in diagrammatic form through a carefully graded cast of characters, and psychologically in terms of their enervating effect upon the Negro office-boy. Other novelists like Neville Dawes (The Last Enchantment, 1960) and Fitzroy Fraser (Wounds in the Flesh, 1962) have been concerned to reveal the legacy of colonialism in West Indian society on the level of personality. Conscious of the enduring effects of slavery and colonialism, other West Indian writers like V. S. Reid and Edgar Mittelholzer have turned to the past: Reid's New Day (1949) seeks to establish a heroic tradition by connecting the Morant Bay uprising of 1865 with the granting of a new constitution to Jamaica in 1944; Mittelholzer's Kaywana trilogy (1952, 1954 and 1958) dramatises Guyanese history from the days of the Dutch trading settlements in the seventeenth century to agitation for independence in British

---

[5] George Lamming The Pleasures of Exile (1960) p.38.

[6] V. S. Naipaul The Middle Passage (1962), p.68.

Guiana in 1953: at the same time the novel illustrates ironically, the course of racial mixture in the area. Most West Indian writers commit themselves to a diagnosis and interpretation of their society as a whole. The difficulty for a West Indian critic in a situation like this is that in seeking to avoid placing a disproportionate value upon content against form he might be inclined to go too far and seem to deny social function altogether. For the non-West Indian critic on the other hand, the difficulty might well lie not so much in judging these works parochial, as in becoming too engrossed in the raw material to apply critical standards.

In an area of deprivation, longing and rootlessness, where so many people are inarticulate, the novelist himself is in the even more difficult position of being tempted into passionate documentary or propaganda. "But it seems to me vital" writes another outstanding West Indian novelist, "in a time when it is easy to succumb to fashionable tyrannies or optimisms - to break away from the conception so many people entertain that literature is an extension of a social order or a political platform... The fact is - even where sincerely held, political radicalism is merely a fashionable attitude unless it is accompanied by profound insights into the experimental nature of the arts and sciences."[7] No other West Indian novelist, as we shall see, takes such an exciting - view of the art of fiction - indeed only the Trinidadian Michael Anthony is as free of the "fashionable tyrannies" of social and political realism; but a look at those writers who have built up or begun to build up an <u>oeuvre</u>, in the sense of having a personal vision or a way of looking that they wish to express and progressively explore, will illustrate how some of the dangers latent in the West Indian literary situation have been avoided. This procedure has the advantages of introducing the major West Indian writers and showing how much variety there is, while insinuating from within, standards by which the other West Indian writers may be measured.

---

[7]Wilson Harris, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel", a lecture published by the London West Indian Students Union (1964).

George Lamming (Barbados, b. 1927)

"Colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian's cultural awareness."[8] The substance of Lamming's four novels so far published is more political than that of any other West Indian writer. Lamming's evocation of the feel of life in an island community, and his nostalgic re-creation of a typical childhood in the West Indies were highly praised when In the Castle of My Skin (1953) was published. His second novel The Emigrants (1954), taking up where the first left off (the boy 'G' preparing to leave his island which has changed so rapidly in his time and with his increasing awareness), is set in part at sea and later in England. Lamming's flair for impressive incident and swiftly particularised characters is worked hard to sustain an illusion of active life, particularly in the emigrant ship section where the characters from various islands are made to pursue a protracted debate on the West Indian situation. And in the part of the novel set in England some spectacular goings-on act as diversion from the recording both of the islanders' disillusionment with England and their awakening as West Indians. It is possible to recognise the thinking-aloud nature of The Emigrants and the easy symbolism of the third novel, Of Age and Innocence (1958), as essential stages towards Lamming's most impressive achievement to date, Season of Adventure (1960). Here, the Barbados of the first novel gives way to the San Cristobal of imagination. The symbolic boys Bob (Negro) Singh (Indian) and Lee (Chinese) on the eve-of-independence San Cristobal are replaced by a cast of fully realised individuals each of whom has independent and unpredictable being. And although it is possible and necessary to see the novel as Lamming's most penetrating vision of the failures and the possibilities of West Indian society, Lamming universalises his fiction through the exploration of the personally felt dilemma of the girl Fola whose witnessing of a religious ceremony for the resurrection of the dead plunges her into an agonised searching out of her own obscure

---

[8]George Lamming The Pleasures of Exile (1960) p.35.

origins and unrealised possibilities. In this novel,[9] Lamming realises an ideal latent in his article 'The Negro Writer and His World', where an analysis of the three worlds of the writers - the private hidden self "his one priceless possession", the society in which he lives, and thirdly "the world to which he is condemned by the fact of his spirit" (the community of Man) - concludes thus on the note of responsibility:

> ...His responsibility to that other world, his third world, will be judged not only by the authenticity and power with which his own private world is presented, but also by the honesty with which he interprets the world of his social relations, his country, that is, for those who have no direct experience of it, but are moved by the power of his speech, his judgment and his good faith.[10]

John Hearne (Jamaica b. 1926)

In The Pleasures of Exile, Lamming accuses Hearne of being obsessed with "an agricultural middle class in Jamaica" and of showing a "loaded concern for a mythological, colonial squirearchy". Lamming, moving from a descriptive statement that West Indian novels are "shot through and through with the urgency of peasant life" to a more questionable prescribing view, judges: "Hearne is a first-class technician, almost perfect within the limitation of conventional story-telling; but the work is weakened, for the language is not being used, and the Novel as a form is not being utilised. His novels suggest that he has a dread of being identified with the land at peasant level." (pp. 45-46). This is not one of the wisest statements by the author of Season of Adventure. Whatever their social or mythological status, Hearne's characters are the only characters in West Indian fiction who are shown appropriating the West Indian scene - sights, sounds, fruit, outdoor activities - creating something solid (though imagined) out of the ruins and squalor that are just as legitimately expressed by other writers. But this is not Hearne's major importance.

Beginning in Voices Under the Window (1955) with the frustration of a personal toil in a society ruled by class and colour formulae, Hearne moves in Stranger at the

---

[9] Discussed in detail in Chapter III.

[10] Caribbean Quarterly Vol. 5 No. 2 (February 1958, published by the Extra-Mural Department, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica).

Gate (1956) to a celebration of personal allegiance over political conflict. Although these novels have broad social relevance, the committment of both Mark Lattimer in the first work, and Roy in the second are presented more as evidence of personal integrity than as effective political stances. With The Faces of Love (1957),[11] Hearne may be said to have discovered his theme. While the novel satirises the materialism of a society in which the energies of the splendid and vulgar Rachel Ascom are corrupted into a lust for power over men and things, we find at the end that Rachel is betrayed out of her unscrupulous amorality into self-sacrifice by the unexpected force of her love for a man she had been ruling sexually. It is to the exploration of love and the female principle that The Autumn Equinox (1959) is committed. After this exploration, Hearne returns to a more recognisable social situation in Land of the Living (1961) to show distressed Negro, analagous Jew, and hard-drinking promiscuous female as equal subjects for love's reclaiming and responsible bewildering clasp. It is one of the signs of West Indian restriction of literary function that these last two novels of Hearne have been coolly received: but it is one of the strengths of West Indian writing that a craftsman of Hearne's calibre can follow his impulse towards a value other than what can be legislated for in the mass.

V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad b. 1932)

The best-known of West Indian novelists, the sense of continuity and development in Naipaul's fiction arises from the inventive redeployment of a repertoire of traditional novelistic skills, and a steadily darkening tone, as a way of writing fiction becomes increasingly a way of seeing the world. In his first work (but the third published) Miguel Street (1959), a collection of stories about the characters of a fictional street, Naipaul's manner of seizing upon an essential defining trait and allowing it to express itself surprisingly (basic lack of change, and surface vitality), his precise observation of gesture and posture, and an uncanny ability to

---

[11]The novel is used in a discussion of John Hearne's fiction in Chapter II.

render the inflections of the speaking voice combine with a near perfect sense of timing to produce an entertaining series of comic sketches. A performer's delight in the animation of his creatures occasionally opens to reveal a deeper compassion as in the story of Laura, 'The Maternal Instinct', or weakens into near-sentimentality as in 'B. Wordsworth' the account of a poet manque. These staple features of Naipaul's fiction are added to in succeeding works: in The Mystic Masseur (1957) and The Suffrage of Elvira (1958) Naipaul replaces the flat framing of a street by the equally cohering but less easily exhaustable contours of a fictional community modelled from the East Indian presence in Trinidad. Of these early works, The Mystic Masseur is the most interesting. In tracing the rise of Ganesh Ramsumair from country Indian to colonial politician, G. Ramsay Muir, through a mock biographer quoting lavishly from Ganesh's own publications, Naipaul satirises delightfully the Indian community as well as the larger static Trinidad society in which Ganesh's not inevitable drift to hollow eminence takes place. If in his first three works Naipaul was, on balance, a popular but ironic entertainer and gentle satirist, his fourth, A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) established him as the author of a major twentieth century novel on the increasingly rare scale of Middlemarch, Anna Karenina or The Rainbow. The three-generation span of the novel gives free play to Naipaul's favourite pattern of authorial setting-up summary followed by abundantly rendered and partly illustrative episode; and the wide cast of secondary characters allows the author's manner of swift and vivid characterisation, enriched by occasional glimpses in depth, to operate with reasonable legitimacy. There are other significant developments. Instead of a vacuous character like Ganesh, the central figure is Mohun Biswas, journalist, visualised in depth as a man aware of the void of his own future and the obscurity of his origin, desperately seeking to make a dent on the world. With such a centre of interest and involvement, the mock biographer of The Mystic Masseur is replaced by the alternately ironic and caressive tones of an omniscient narrator not always able

to remain on the controlling periphery.[12] In his most recent work Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion (1963), Naipaul's vision of decay and ultimately illusory achievement is more sombrely transplanted to an English setting and expressed in the post-retirement marriage and social work of an English bachelor terrified by the approaching End.

Michael Anthony (Trinidad, b. 1932)

With only three novels[13] so far published, and these unspectacularly concerned with experiences in childhood and youth, Anthony is the West Indian novelist whose originality is still to be fully recognised. It is significant that Anthony is the least formally educated and the least intellectual of the known West Indian writers; but this is not sufficient in itself, for there is a great difference between Anthony's work and the ragged - trousered - philanthropist themes and style of Earl Lovelace's While Gods are Falling (1965). Anthony, it is to be hoped, is the first of a new breed of West Indian novelists with the assurance and the qualities of sensibility to discover in the lives and natural surroundings of the folk, what Wilson Harris describes as "the outlines of a drama of consciousness in which the writer is involved as both a passive and a creative agent... as if within his work he sets out again and again across a certain territory of primordial but broken recollection in search of a community or species of fiction whose existence he begins to discern."[14]

In his freedom from conventional social and political themes; his fidelity to the open consciousnesses of his protagonists and narrators; his choice of weak characters susceptible to shock and mystery; his portrayal of the instability of

---

[12] A more qualified but essentially appreciative account of this novel is given in Chapter IV.

[13] The Games were Coming (1963), The Year in San Fernando (1965), and Green Days by the River (1967).

[14] Wilson Harris 'The Writer and Society' in Tradition The Writer and Society (New Beacon Publications, London, 1967) p.48.

'character'; the spontaneous metaphorical activity of his language (particularly in The Year in San Fernando[15], (1965) and the persistent device by which a memory void of all but the sensation of living is utilised in the creating of a fictional landscape, Michael Anthony, so different in style, technique and range is the closest in spirit of all West Indian writers, to Wilson Harris, that most staggering of imaginative talents to have emerged from the Caribbean area.

Wilson Harris (Guyana b. 1921)

"Most of the novelists of today do not feel sufficiently strongly about anything to be urged into attempting some large-scale work of individual vision which ... shall not merely impress us, the readers, but radically change our view of life...". So writes Anthony Burgess in a recent survey of contemporary fiction.[16] In each of the six years beginning with 1960 when Palace of the Peacock was first published, Harris has had a novel issued by the publishers Faber and Faber. A break in 1966 was followed by the appearance in 1967 of Harris' seventh work to date The Waiting Room. During this time Harris has also produced two critical pieces of distinction, and contributed several reviews to an abortive West Indian fortnightly newspaper in London, Magnet News. These essays are not done in the colours of clarity, but they throw light both on Harris' novels and on the art of fiction in general. Not the least of their value is that they provide terms for describing the extraordinary experiences we are made to endure as we follow the writer's oeuvre. For in Harris one is confronted with one of the few novelists of the twentieth century who possesses and is possessed by an individual vision which radically alters our view of life.

In 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' (already cited) Harris described the novel which is concerned with 'character' as the "novel of persuasion", 'character' resting on the notion of "the self-sufficient individual and on grounds of apparent common sense". a certain selection, Harris continues, "is made by the writer, the

---

[15] The Year in San Fernando is discussed at length in Chapter IV.

[16] Anthony Burgess The Novel Now (1967) p.19.

selection of items, manners, uniform conversation, historical situations, etc., all landing themselves to build and present an individual span of life which yields self-conscious and fashionable judgements, self-conscious and fashionable moralities. The tension which emerges is the tension of individuals, great or small - on an accepted plane of society we are persuaded has an inevitable existence." The justice or injustice of this view is not at issue here. It is from this position that we can begin to understand what Harris means by the "vision of consciousness" which fiction ought to promote in preference to social realism.

In the Guyana novels, from Palace of the Peacock to Heartland (1964), Harris evokes an immense and unpredictable landscape, brooding forest and seething river, crumbling marshland and pegasse lakes infested with tacouba. Harris invokes the Guyanese landscape as a world of what he calls "corrosive sensibility" in which one begins "to distrust one's preconceptions and to dig for a revelation or vision of life which is beyond the conventional modes of expression." How this appears in the fiction may be illustrated from an experience in Palace of the Peacock when the crew who are journeying upriver have to travel overland for a short period. The "I" narrator who had previously confessed that he is going blind in one eye comes into consciousness of this spirited place:

> The trees rose round me into upward flying upward limbs when I screwed my eyes to stare from underneath above. At last I lifted my head into a normal position... The forest rustled and rippled with a sigh and ubiquitous step. I stopped dead where I was, frightened for no reason whatever. The step near me stopped and stood still. I stared round me wildly, in surprise and terror, and my body grew faint and trembling as a woman's or a child's. I gave a loud ambushed cry which was no more than an echo of myself - a breaking and grotesque voice, man and boy, age and youth speaking together...
> (Palace of the Peacock, pp. 27-28)

This is not simply an evocation of a spirit of place. The narrator's grotesque voice, "man and boy, age and youth speaking together" works as an invocation, for he recovers to find himself supported by the aged Schomburgh and the youth Carroll, two other members of the crew. It is as if Carroll and Schomburgh (Negro and European) had

been waiting for this crisis, and in the complex intimacy their succeeding confrontation suggests, any tendency the reader may have had to identify with the narrating "I" is quickly dispersed. The figures in Harris' fiction are revealed in a curious essential form of communion.

Moving away in the Guyana novels from the concept of the more or less self-sufficient character in a specific historical or social situation, Harris creates a world in which those distinctions we erect to order experience in 'real' life are broken down. Persons become one another. Different centuries collapse into one time. One action opens into another in time or links up with its analogue in another place. Harris' "Vision of consciousness" is a vision of extraordinary unity including a whole explosive involuntary ground of relationships and metamorphoses. The characters' unawareness of these relationships, or their inability to articulate them, create difficulties for the reader of conventional novels who is accustomed to identifying with the single character or to being persuaded into a certain broadly moral attitude. This difficulty is particularly acute in the first three novels. But in The Secret Ladder (1964) and Heartland (1965) a new development begins to emerge.

Harris returns to something like a story-line and to what looks like a conventional character. Whereas before, the characters were dislocated images expressing Harris' "vision of consciousness" in an involuntary way, Russell Fenwick in The Secret Ladder and Stevenson in Heartland are shown in the process of becoming aware of this vision. The effect of this is to give the reader something concrete, though crumbling, to hold on to: not surprisingly these two novels are the ones described as most coherent by some readers. But it would be a mistake to imagine that Harris has compromised. In the next two novels The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965) and The Waiting Room (1967) it becomes apparent that Fenwick andStevenson were at the beginning of a period of introspection or interiorisation. In the two latest works Guyana drops out and so does Harris' highly effective use of dialect; the 'action' emerges in tortured

words from the memory of a diarist in the one work, and more obscurely takes place in the skull of a blind woman in the other. The Waiting Room begins:

> Susan Forrestal was blind. She drew the palm of her hand slowly across her face as if to darken her own image, and to discover therein another sun of personality. "He" it was whom she began to discern like the ancient seal - the ancient soul of love.
>
> The sun fell on the slumbering brickwork of her flesh. Through the blind or curtained window where "he" sat and watched FROM WITHIN HER SKULL, the tops of vehicles could be seen as they passed, and still beyond - upon the pavement at the opposite side of the street - passers by were reflected in a shop window.

These last two novels are not as obscure as they seem to be if we follow Harris through the corrosive landscape of the first three novels to the troubled consciousnesses of the next two and into the phase of interiorisation.

The significance of the oeuvre being built up in this sustained imaginative effort becomes trite in the announcing. For the essential and exciting part of the process is the way in which Harris' highly metaphorical and image-charged language, his gnarled and twisted syntax, and ponderous yoking of words with their opposites, combine with his radically unconventional narrative techniques to create a disturbance in our reading. This disturbance is analogous to the uprooting of our settled notions of reality as we are led to a far more life enhancing vision of unity.[17]

Roger Mais (Jamaica, 1905-1955)

Beginning with an avowedly social protest intention, Roger Mais developed dramatically away from this concern through his first two novels The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953) and Brother Man (1954), to his masterpiece Black Lightning (1955) in which his vision of life at last finds comfortable expression. Since this instructive exploratory process is looked at novel by novel in Chapter V it is not necessary to go into it here.

Two other Novelists of Note

Although Edgar Mittelholzer (Guyana 1909-1965) and Samuel Selvon (Trinidad b. 1923) have had several novels published, the same sense of dynamic growth cannot be

---

17This is discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

traced in their works as in those of the major figures outlined above. Mittelholzer's sense of the interaction of person and place is best expressed in Shadows Move Among Them (1951); his major contemporary novel is not the slight and schematic A Morning at the Office (1950) so much as Sylvia (1953) in which the heroine is exposed to the consuming pressures of a society made more desperate by the impact of the war; the Kaywana trilogy have a certain importance as gesture but Mittelholzer's sense of the past, of the animated landscape, and for what is mysterious in the human person are brought together in what is probably his finest work, the 'ghost' story My Bones and My Flute (1955). With a number of novels set in England determined by theories of the psyche or devoted to penal reform of a near fascist order, Mittelholzer was the most prolific of West Indian writers (one novel in 1941 and twenty-two between 1950 and 1965). An introspective note, sounded as early as Sylvia in 1953, returned in Mittelholzer's last two novels of which The Jilkington Drama (1965) seems a partial success.

Selvon's novels have been curiously uneven. His A Brighter Sun (1952) is a delightful and serious account of growing up in Trinidad and of the 'creolisation' of a descendant of Indians. It is the first West Indian novel in which dialect becomes the language of introspection. Selvon's other novels do not quite measure up to his first; but in the sequences of The Lonely Londoners (1956) and the stories Ways of Sunlight (1958), his control of dialect, his flair for the comic incident in which he emerges unpatronisingly as 'one of the boys', and his serious concern for the plight of his fellow West Indians in London are the ingredients of an art of fiction closest to the oral form, the calypso. The manner is seen in brilliant operation in the story 'Brackley and the Bed' to be found in Ways of Sunlight.

In addition to the writers and oeuvres mentioned above, a number of single works (most of them discussed later) can only be listed here: Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959); Geoffrey Drayton's Christopher (1959) and Zohara (1961);

Jan Carew's Black Midas (1958); Alvin Bennett's God the Stonebreaker (1964); Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea (1966); Denis Williams' Other Leopards (1963); and Garth St. Omer's novella 'Syrop' a work of great promise which appeared in Introduction 2: Stories by New Writers (1964) and has passed virtually unregarded.

The incidence of writers building up oeuvres in ways that suggest personal vision or idiosyncratic ways of seeing, as well as of writers inspired to produce single works of merit, suggests the richness of the West Indian literary output. It also raises further critical problems. Between sophisticated extremes, - the traditional approach of V. S. Naipaul and the unorthodox techniques of Wilson Harris - the West Indian novelists use a wide range of narrative conventions and fictional techniques. Most of these writers (some deliberately, others in innocence) disregard formal issues like doctrines about point of view or distinctions between telling and showing. And a concern with the state of society or with politics makes some novels resistant to an approach developed to cope with novels dealing with manners and morals. Instead of seeing all this as a tentative groping en masse by the new writers from the colonies ("the search for form") or as an opportunity to erect a form of prescription based upon nation or race ("an aesthetic for the West Indian novel") it seems better to operate flexibly and allow the novels themselves to dictate the particular terms, under the broad heading 'fiction' in which they are to be spoken about.

That there is a substantial fiction from the West Indies and that a relatively high proportion of it is of good quality; these are the premises with which this study began and which it must in part substantiate. But there are problems to be coped with. The lack of basic information about writers, works and periods; and the absence of a West Indian critical tradition are more acutely felt because most West Indian writers live in London and have their works published and read in England.

This circumstance encourages the documentary tendency already noted to the extent that the novels become primary evidence for theories about West Indian society. Meanwhile, the fiction is not felt in the West Indies as part of the social and cultural life of the islands.

This study tries to deal with the whole nexus of problems in a cross-disciplinary fashion. On one level it tries to trace the growth of West Indian fiction and to illuminate its background, thus placing it in its proper social context and preparing the way for informed critical appreciation by its largely non-West Indian readers. This provides the outer frame for the thesis and determines the Chapter headings. Chapter II Life without Fiction ranges from the eighteenth century to the 1940's tracing the growth of writing in the islands in relation to the development of West Indian society and charting the inevitable drift of the present generation of novelists to London. In Chapters III, IV and V the critical problems raised by this exile situation are approached under the broad headings 'Race', 'Language' and 'Society'. Finally in Chapter VI, 'Precursors', a resume of the continuing significance of older West Indian writers is followed by an account of the life and career of Claude McKay (1890-1948) the first West Indian Negro novelist and the first to go into exile, but paradigmatic in even deeper critical senses than this.

Such is the outer shape of the thesis. Within the chapters lie seemingly digressive pockets of literary criticism and literary history. These are important as part of the informational load. But it is felt that coming alongside the background elements, they would both engage with problems of art and serve as exercises in the critical use of background.

Instead of an essay type conclusion, hardly practicable in view of the kind of argument being pursued, there will be a select list divided into (A) and (B) categories, of the novels judged to be outstanding as a result of this study.

CHAPTER II

Life Without Fiction

A distinctive body of writing from the West Indies only began to emerge in the twentieth century. This means that for over three hundred years, life in the islands was a life without fiction. The present chapter divides easily into three parts. I want first, through an account of popular education in the nineteenth century, to offer reasons why there were at that time no writers and few readers of fiction among the Negro and other Black people in the West Indies. In the next part, through a description of the lives of the other elements in the population, I shall try to show how those who were technically capable neither read nor produced literary works in the nineteenth or in the eighteenth centuries. Finally, I shall return to the twentieth century to describe the literary situation in the islands prior to and since the emigration of West Indian writers to the United Kingdom where most of their works are sold and first published. The chapter divides into three parts, but each part is a version of a continuing story.

(i) Popular Education in the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century

The subject is a large one, and as there is as yet no historical account of it, the temptation to excesses is great. But my chief purpose is to argue that in the nineteenth century, popular education in the West Indies was essentially elementary education; it was neither sufficiently extensive, nor deep enough to create a public able to read and write - even by the least demanding criteria; the system, such as it was, might produce a few distinguished Negroes for the professions (mainly Law and Medicine with the Church a poor third) but a

nineteenth century Negro novelist or poet would have been an exception among exceptions.

A convenient starting point for glancing at nineteenth century patterns is provided in the work of a leading researcher in the history of West Indian education: "Only in exceptional circumstances ... were slave children educated in any way. Those born in the West Indies were usually put in the care of an elderly woman slave as early as possible to release their mothers for work. ... By six years old they were already in the third gang with the old women, collecting food for animals, and weeding. ... From there they graduated to the canefields to start in earnest the endless round of sugar cultivation which was to occupy the rest of their lives."[1]

The break from these confines came with the emancipation of the slaves. Included in the Act of Emancipation (1833) was a resolution that "His Majesty be enabled to defray ... any such expense as he may incur ... in providing upon liberal and comprehensive principles for the religious and moral Education of the Negro Population to be emancipated."[2] After some calculation the Negro Education Grant was allocated to the different religious bodies already at work in the colonies, because "the past success of these various societies in diffusing education among the negroes, though greatly limited by a deficiency of funds, affords satisfactory grounds for anticipating the most favourable results from an increase of means ..." and because "the establishment of a new and distinct system would tend to interfere with their operations, without deriving any assistance from their agency."[3] This was a convenient view to hold; it was soon to prove a mistaken one.

---

[1]Shirley C. Gordon A Century of West Indian Education (1963) p.10

[2]Quoted from A Century of West Indian Education, p.20. I am greatly indebted to this source-book and to Miss Gordon's commentary. All further quotations of source-material from it will be indicated by "Source-book" followed by page references. Where I use Miss Gordon's commentary, the name "Gordon" followed by page references to A Century of West Indian Education will make the distinction.

[3]Earl Grey, Prime Minister, to the Treasury, 21st July, 1835. (Source-book p.22)

The missionaries' competence was not equal to their zeal: expansion was carried out without thought to recurrent expenditure on items like teachers' salaries and the maintenance of buildings, the denominations acting in "utter ignorance of each others' proceedings." Many of the colonial legislatures, far from giving aid, even withheld their sanction. Like the rest of the monied classes they were in doubt as to the possible effects of universal education on the masses. The recently-freed population on the other hand were apathetic, or sceptical of the value of "this great Education".

The reservations of the influential groups in the islands, and the apathy of the population to be educated, so early manifested, were to take complicated shapes as the century advanced. One way of looking at the matter is to see it as a debate about the content and aims of education for the specific community: should the bias be towards the agricultural and technical or should it be literary and classical? Evidence tendered to the Jamaica Education Commission (1898) by "Ministers of Religion, Newspaper Editors, School Managers, Teachers in Public and Private Schools, Members of Public Boards, Government Officials, Planters, Peasant Proprietors, Employers of Labour and Artisans and representatives of every class and phase of opinion interested in education"[4] reveals that the issue, never settled in nineteenth century practice, was still a fluid one in the mind of the responsible public. Some of the headings under which the evidence was arranged[5] support the notion of a theory of education debate: "It is desirable or practicable to have more Agricultural Teaching in Elementary Schools?" and "Should Elementary Education be made more practical and less literary?"

---

[4]"Supplementary Notes on Education in Jamaica 1898-1900" in Special Reports on Educational Subjects, Volume 4, H.M.S.O., (1901) /Cd 416/. See pp. 665-680.

[5]By the summariser in "Supplementary Notes ..."

But it is difficult to separate the theoretical aspects of a relevant debate from the interests and prejudices of the groups involved. There was never in the nineteenth century an accepted objective for West Indian education, but each party had its own ideas. The Colonial Office[6] advised religious education and the requirements of small farmers, as well as a grammatical knowledge of the English language "as the most important agent of civilisation for the coloured population of the colonies." Further, ... "the lesson books of the colonial schools should also teach the mutual interests of the mother-country and her dependencies; the rational basis of their connection, and the domestic and social duties of the coloured races." Latrobe[7] reported in 1838 that the planters and employers would not support education unless it seemed to accept (as Latrobe himself did) "that the finger of Providence evidently points out the estate or the plantation as the natural field of industry for the majority of the rising generation of the poorer classes in these islands." The system ought strongly to impress upon the mind "the necessity of submitting to labour, not only as it yeilds the means of satisfying brute nature, but as it is conducive to social order, morality and happiness." Increasingly in the century however, the deprived masses were to see a bookish education as a means of social advancement; from the beginning they were suspicious of practical instruction as a planter-formulated design to restrict them to what had always been the lower stations of life. Because each party had its own ideas, there was never in the nineteenth century a coherent set of objectives for West Indian education.

At the beginnings, the years of the Negro Education Grant were years of incompetence, and years without clearly directed policy. As early as 1841 it was becoming apparent to the Imperial Government that its partnership with the

---

[6]Circular despatch ... 26th January, 1847. (Source-book, p.58)
[7]Latrobe, Windwards and Leewards, 1838 (Source-book, p.30)

religious bodies was not a creative one. The Grant, which was expensive to maintain was brought to an end by 1845. A Circular Despatch of October 1, 1845, cynically made the island legislatures responsible for providing to educate the people. The labouring population were to be informed at the same time of Her Majesty's earnest desire "that they should make every exertion in their power to obtain instruction for themselves and their children; and that they should evince their gratitude for the blessings of freedom by such present sacrifices for this object as shall make freedom most conducive in the end to their happiness and moral and spiritual well-being. ... If the Labouring Classes at large should be animated by the same spirit of steady and patient industry which ought always to accompany good instruction, the boon of freedom will not have been bestowed on them in vain, but will give birth to all the fruits which Her Majesty and other well-wishers have expected from it." (Source-book p.42)

The withdrawal of the Negro Education Grant brought the first enthusiastic phase of educational activity in the islands to an end. Financial difficulties that were to persist into the twentieth century, now came clearly into view: throughout the century it was not within the means of the recently-freed, but still socially-depressed, labouring population to carry out Queen Victoria's optimistic exhortation; between the denominations already at work, and the legislatures in financial control, conflicts were to open up over educational policy. More specifically, the near-absolute dependence upon funds from the island legislatures was a deterrent to the spread of popular education in two ways. Tied now to the island economies, the educational budget would vary as these economies suffered and fluctuated in these years. And whenever a clash occurred, as it was to do increasingly in the century, between the stated need to expand elementary education and the desire to provide higher forms, the legislators, whose social group was more likely to benefit from secondary school provision, would decide in their own narrow interests.

It was, therefore, against a depressed and depressing social and economic background that efforts to expand elementary education persisted in the nineteenth century. Even concentrating on the end of the century when the situation would have been better than at an earlier time, it is clear that the number of school places provided was always only a fraction of the number required. A table[8] compiled by the Inspector of Schools, British Guiana, 1894, helps to measure the extent of the provision:

Colony	Number of Schools	Number of Scholars on Books	Number of Scholars in Average Attendance	Cost Per Scholar in Average Attendance	Percentage of revenue on Primary Education	Population as per last Census
British Guiana	195	26,872	14,721	£6.12	3.2	278,328
Jamaica	912	92,135	52,983	£3.94	6.0	639,491
Trinidad	169	18,247	10,992	£10.16	3.7	200,028
(a) Gov't Schools	63	6,335	3,878	£13.74		
(b) Ass'd Schools	106	11,912	7,114	£8.21		
Barbados	202	26,691	15,240	£3.05	5.9	182,306
Grenada	32	6,247	3,249	£6.55	7.9	53,209

By themselves, these figures are flattering. In a speech in the Legislative Council, 20th December, 1889, the Governor of Trinidad had stated that "there are still some 17,000 out of probably 36,000 in the island who are not receiving any education whatever." The Barbados Census for 1891 shows that there were 73,319 children under fifteen years in the island. Taking Trinidad and Barbados as typical, it is fair to conclude that the scholars on the books constituted fewer than half the number of children of school age.

On a straight quantitative reckoning therefore, popular education in the nineteenth century was woefully inadequate. When quality is taken into account,

[8]Source-book, p.119.

the abysmal proportions of the failure become discernible. "Existing accommodation is frequently badly planned and in a chronic state of disrepair and insanitation. Teachers are inadequate in number and are in most Colonies not well paid. Their training is largely defective or non-existent, and far too great reliance is placed on the pupil-teacher system ... Curricula are on the whole ill-adapted to the needs of the large mass of the population and adhere far too closely to models which have become out of date in the British practice from which they were blindly copied."[9] These remarks are taken from the report of the Moyne Commission on education in the islands, 1938-1939. In the dark days of the nineteenth century matters were even worse. The "payment by results" system, transferred from England, affected adversely the quality and supply, and the methods of teachers: memorisation became entrenched as a teaching and learning method against the visits of the Inspector; the increase in the number of pupils attending created a demand for more teachers; since there were few training colleges,[10] and since the curricula[11] for the teachers' examinations were unrealistically ambitious (producing a failure rate of more than two-thirds of the aspirants) more and more pupil-teachers[12] were recruited. So where the underpaid and incompetent certificated teacher left off, his pupil-understudy blundered on.

As the table already quoted shows, irregularieties in attendance affected the quality of education drastically. In the first place, only about half the students on the books gave average attendance, a figure that is deceptive since it cannot be made to tell for how many years or how continually the pupils recorded as in attendance for a particular year might have carried on. The

---

[9] West India Royal Commission Report Cmd. 6607 published 1945. See page 92.

[10] In Trinidad, 1900, there were four Training Schools catering for 44 students. See Special Reports on Educational Subjects, Volume 12 H.M.S.O. (1905) /Cd. 2377/ p. 193.

[11] Samples of the examination requirements for elementary schools, pupil teachers, and teachers' certificates are given in Appendix Three.

[12] The proportion of pupil teachers to certificated teachers in Jamaica 1898-1899 was 533 to 411. See Special Reports ... Vol. 4 p. 685.

following table[13] for Jamaica (1897-8) illustrates the kind of thinning out that took place in all West Indian schools:

Standard	A	B	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Average Age	$7^{2}/_{7}$	9	10	10	10	11	11	$11\frac{1}{2}$	$12\frac{1}{2}$
Number	32,917	14,308	13,101	10,278	8,917	7,040	5,084	2,580	141

The number completing a full course were only a fraction of those commencing. Early leavers might just as well have never attended.

The evidence of J. R. Williams (Inspector of Schools) to the Jamaica Education Commission of 1898 conveniently summarises the difficulties I have been outlining, and relates them, as they have to be, to the social and domestic setting:

> The difficulties attending the education of the lower classes are not fully realised: we have had to evolve our own system, and it may well be that we do not know what is most suitable for the race that we have to do with. We have had to make teachers, and that cannot be done in a generation; irregularity of attendance cripples the efforts of such teachers as we have; and their efforts are still further thwarted by the influence of the children's lives at home and the examples of their parents. A system can hardly be said to be fairly and thoroughly at work till those who have passed through the schools fill the parents' class - and it will be many years before that is true here. Finally we are apt to forget that Elementary Education is only one of the means of civilisation. While ... the home life of most of the peasantry continues to be as uncivilised and demoralising as it is, the expenditure on elementary education must be partially wasted and disappointing.[14]

Given all these conditions the standard of popular education in the nineteenth century could not be very high.

It is within such a badly-financed and labouring system of education, and with a view to showing how unlikely was the creation of a reading public that I would like now to look at the place of Reading as a school subject. It was one of the three "Chief subjects" and therefore compulsory; but the evidence of

---

[13] From Special Reports ... Vol. 4 p. 684.

[14] Special Reports ... Vol. 4, p. 679.

examination requirements, what is known about teaching conditions and teaching methods, and contemporary comment suggest that, in the nineteenth century, the ability to read was and could only have been the ability to utter words mechanically from a page.

The Bible as a source of Reading material had been complemented, and in non-denominational schools largely superseded by compilations of other "useful" material. When, late in the century, more literary texts began to be recommended (in imitation of the pattern first made possible in England in 1883) it was in the form of extracts only from major authors and restricted to pupils in the Fifth standard and above. Few schools actually changed from the more convenient readers already familiar to the teachers, so it is fair to claim that for most of the century, pupils had virtually no chance of making even the slightest contact with works of imaginative literature.

The examination requirements for as late as 1898 in Jamaica[15] (a typical case) bear the generalisation out, and lead into a discussion of the objectives of teachers, and the methods they were obliged to adopt in coaching their pupils in Reading:

A (Under seven's):	To read simultaneously, and separately from blackboard, simple sentences containing words of elementary sounds ...
	To recite simultaneously and separately a simple school song or hymn.
B (Under ten's):	As before, but including words up to the standard of Infant Readers.
	To recite three verses as before.
C (StandardI):	To read a short passage from a First Standard Reader.
	To recite four verses as before.
Standard II:	To read a short passage from a Second Standard Reader.
	To recite 20 lines of simple verse as before.
Standard III:	To read a passage from a Third Standard reader.
	To recite 30 lines of poetry and to know their meaning.
Standard IV:	To read a passage from a Fourth Standard reader.
	To recite 40 lines of poetry and to know their meaning.
Standard V:	To read a passage from some standard author or from a Fifth Standard reader.
	To recite 50 lines of poetry and to explain the words and allusions.

---

[15] See Appendix F of Special Reports ... Vol. 4 p. 608

Standard VI: To read a passage from one of Shakespeare's historical plays or from some other standard author.
To recite 60 lines from some standard poet, and to explain the words and allusions.

Standard VII: To read a passage from Shakespeare or Milton or from some other standard author.
To recite 60 lines from Shakespeare or Milton or some other standard author and to explain the words and allusions.

The pressing financial need to manufacture a good result; the restriction to one book per year; and the shortage of copies of books in large classes ensured that the memory method, already entrenched in other subjects, would be ruthlessly applied here too. The exercise of memory frankly demanded by Reading's ancillary subject - Recitation - must have provided light practice and relevant diversion from the year-long marathon. A pupil being tested could hardly have been unlike today's schoolboy "translating" Latin authors with the aid of a previously memorised key. A pass in these circumstances did not necessarily mean that a pupil could read competently and with understanding. The testimony of C. E. Aitken (Acting Registrar-General) to the Jamaica Education Commission is to the point: "If you take the average schoolboy and let him read from a book in which he has not been coached, he cannot explain to you at the end what he has been reading about."[16]

Elementary school literacy was not, of course, conceived of as a possible base condition for the reading of imaginative literature. So little was that even seen as a prospect that Nelson's Royal Readers, which had become established in the islands and which contained a small enough proportion of literary material, were being seriously challenged in the 1890's by Blackie's Tropical Readers whose advantage was that they offered agricultural training at the same time as reading practice. So much indeed were those responsible for the cirriculum committed to a strictly utilitarian principle that the Jamaica Education Commission, 1898, suggested more than once in their report that "one Reading Book

---

[16] Special Reports ... Vol. 4 p.678

including the instruction in History and Geography be specially composed." Without suspecting the incompatibility in their aims if one Reading book were to serve in this hold-all fashion, the same Commission had prefaced their advice as follows: "We think that Reading requires great improvement, and that greater attention and more time should be devoted to it. It would probably be improved and made more interesting, and at the same time a love of reading might be created ..."[17] Physical conditions in the schoolroom, the obligation to stand and deliver when the Inspector came and the laborious memorisation drills were unpleasant enough to produce poor results and to create antipathy to the very act of reading. The unrelieved factualness of approach to the Reading books prevented both pupils and teachers from even a suspicion of the pleasures and possibilities of imagination. But I want to postpone for a while the discussion of attitudes to the written word and to literature that were taking root in this period, and complete a sketch of the externals of the situation.

A Royal Commission on the Financial Condition of Jamaica (1883) found that of a total adult Negro population of 250,000 only 22,000 could read and write.[18] It is certain that many more than 22,000 pupils had passed through the schools in the fifty years of education before the survey. Making allowances for deaths, it is still not possible to avoid the conclusion that some of those who had parroted their way through the Reading test had lapsed easily back into their untutored states. A certain amount of deliberate forgetting is not improbable. But even those who might have wished to, had little obvious opportunity to practise their hard-learnt skill. For what was true at the end of the century was equally depressing in the preceding years: there were no libraries, no popular newspaper, and no continuation schools or classes. There was also no possibility, so it was alleged, of instituting the latter: "Work begins for the labouring class about

---

[17] Special Reports ... Vol. 4 pp. 647-649

[18] Source-book p.93

six o'clock in the morning and ends about five o'clock in the afternoon, and the great majority of the people go to bed very early. A system of evening continuation schools would mean little less than a revolution in the social habits of the people, and would be difficult to introduce except to a limited extent in towns."[19]

The situation is gloomier still when it is remembered that literacy for Census purposes included the merest ability to scratch out a signature: it is reasonable to suppose, in the light of what has been said about attendance at schools and teaching conditions, that many of those recorded as literate were in the lowest divisions of the literacy scale.

Matters were just as bad, if not worse, in the case of the incoming and not yet English-speaking East Indians in Guyana and Trinidad. The Inspector of Schools in British Guiana in the Report for 1893-94[20] was in great despair: "There is the greatest reluctance on the part of the great majority of the coolies to send their children to school; how to overcome that reluctance I do not quite see. They appear to think that by sending their children to school they are conferring a favour, and that they ought to receive the same amount of money for attending school as they can by working on an Estate. Even the small children below nine years of age are usually conducted to school by what is known as a 'driver'."

A further complication not strictly arising from economic considerations lay in the unwillingness of East Indian parents to allow their children to attend the same schools as Negro children: "An Indian will not send his child to a Creole school; he is afraid of injustice being done to his children by the Creole teachers, and of ill-usage from Creole pupils. The Creole, as a rule, looks down on the Indian, he is a semi-civilised being. He speaks a barbarous tongue and his manners are barbarous. He comes to Trinidad to make money for there is no money in his own

---

19 Special Reports ... Vol. 4 p.599

20 Source-Book p.119

country. He takes work much cheaper than the Creole will do, hence he must be ill-treated when he can be ill-treated with impunity."[21] There is no need to examine the policy behind or quality of Indian education in the special schools provided for them. But the evidence[22] of Rev. K. S. Grant, head of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission makes it obvious that it came to little more than the teaching of English to foreigners:

> Chairman: Could you give the Commission any rough idea of what proportion of the coolies speak English?
> Rev. Grant: It would be rather difficult to answer that directly Sir. Many of them understand English, but they are accustomed to use the Hindustani language in their own houses. But a great many understand it.
> Chairman: Do many read in it?
> Rev. Grant: Oh yes; I have just noticed in my report this year that I had 3,700 that have passed through my school, and I suppose most of those understand English fairly .....

Later in the same interview, Reverend Grant described wonderful results:

> Chairman: Have they reading clubs?
> Rev. Grant: Yes, they have the reading club in San Fernando here and they get papers from Europe and from America.
> Chairman: And they read in English then?
> Rev. Grant: Yes; you see, we have been at work seventeen years in this town and these young people have gone through our schools.

But against Rev. Grant's enthusiasm it is necessary to place the severe account of the Inspector of Schools, Trinidad (1902); "The total number of East Indians on the school registers on the 31st March, 1901 was only 4,384, with an average daily attendance during the immediately preceding quarter of 2,496. Of the 4,384 children on the registers, 3,460 were boys and 924 were girls. If the East Indian children attended school in the same proportion as the children of the rest of the population, there would be between 12,000 and 13,000 on the school registers ...[23]

Although there were differences of emphasis and a time-lag between Negro education and Indian education both socially depressed groups remained largely

---

[21] Source-Book p.123

[22] Source-Book pp. 123 and 124

[23] Special Reports ... Vol. 12, p.191

illiterate in the nineteenth century. It is, however, in the nineteenth century that we can begin to see the foundations of characteristic twentieth century West Indian attitudes to reading, literature and education in general. On the one hand there was the antipathy that grew up as a reaction to the joyless and abortive school experience; at the same time there was the awe of the illiterate and uneducated at the power of education and the written word. In most cases, these contradictory attitudes were, as they still are, held simultaneously. The ambivalent complex is rooted in a continuing history of frustration and yearning. Samuel Selvon's novel A Brighter Sun (1952) conveniently illustrates one extreme. When Tiger the young East Indian hero who has been teaching himself to read and write suggests to Rita that his wife Urmilla could be deceiving him, Rita explodes:

> 'Get out me blasted chair!' Rita shouted. 'Get out de house, yuh worthless bitch! You have a nasty coolie mind! ... Yuh suspect she horning yuh! Yuh ain't have no shame? Dat poor gul don't even look at any odder man but you, though she well have cause! And yuh know what have yuh so? Yuh know why yuh mind turning nasty? Because yuh reading all dem book, because yuh finding out too much things bout life. Dat's why. Learning to read! Learning to write!'
>
> (A Brighter Sun, p.157)

In V. S. Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur (1957) on the other hand, the illiterate's awe at the written word is a source of comic effect. Early in the novel, the boy-patient's amazement at the number of books in Ganesh's consulting room leads to the following set-piece between the masseur and his wife:

> 'Leela', Ganesh said, 'the boy want to know how much book it have here.'
> 'Let me see,' Leela said, and hitched up the broom to her waistband. She started to count off the fingers of her left hand. 'Four hundred Everyman, two hundred Penguin - six hundred. Six hundred, and one hundred Reader's Library, make seven hundred. I think with all the other book it have about fifteen hundred good book here.'
> The taxi-driver whistled, and Ganesh smiled.
> 'They is all yours, pundit?' I asked.
> 'Is my only vice,' Ganesh said. 'Only vice. I don't smoke. I don't drink. But I most have my books. And mark you, every week I going to San Fernando to buy more, you know. How much book I buy last week, Leela?'
> 'Only three, man,' she said. 'But they was big books, big big books. Six to seven inches altogether.'
> 'Seven inches,' Ganesh said.
> 'Yes, seven inches,' Leela said. (The Mystic Masseur, p.11)

Both these popular attitudes to education and the written word, continuing from the nineteenth century, have helped to prevent the growth as yet of a broadly-based reading public in the West Indies. This lends a peculiar irony to George Lamming's claim in The Pleasures of Exile (1960) that "it is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality" (p.39). For while one is inclined to agree with Lamming that the work of most West Indian novelists "is shot through and through with the urgency of peasant life", the peasant (in the city slum or in the country) cannot be said to be conscious of these novels or of their significance. I shall return to this issue and some of its consequences in the third part of this chapter. Meanwhile I want to continue sketching the establishment of popular education in the nineteenth century, and seeing in this period the signs of things to come.

Although there was not an educated Negro public in the nineteenth century, there were distinguished Negroes. In The Evolution of the Negro, N. E. Cameron[24] writes of James Reginald Moore, well known in 1854 as teacher of a day-school and an "African Night School". According to Cameron, Moore had written in 1874 during a period of temporary retirement a booklet on the "Causes of the non-success of the Negro Race in British Guiana". Some time after re-entering the teaching profession, certainly by 1888, Moore became "the first black Anglican minister in this country". In The Evolution of the Negro Cameron gives information about at least three other leading Negroes: Rev. Dr. J. E. London "a prominent and comparatively wealthy Negro" who was one of the judges in a horticultural show held in the Promenade Gardens, Georgetown, 1893; A. A. Thorne whose private class became "a large and highly recognised school", and through whose influence

---

[24] N. E. Cameron The Evolution of the Negro, two volumes, printed by The Argosy Company Limited, Georgetown, Demerara, 1934. A rare and neglected but very useful work. The Negroes are noted in Vol. II, Bk. II pp.73-74; footnote to p.49; p.77 and footnote to pp.123-124.

in the middle eighteen-nineties "dark girls were enabled to reach a high standard in secondary education", even to the point of being able to secure employment in the Civil Service; and the Hon. A. B. Brown "the first of pure Negro race to be a member of the then Combined Court of British Guiana" who held his seat uninterruptedly for a period of 25 years from 1897. Guyana was not unique in this respect. In The English in the West Indies (1887) James Anthony Froude reports: "Before my stay at Barbadoes ended, I had an opportunity of meeting at dinner a Negro of pure blood who has risen to eminence by his own talent and character. He has held the office of attorney-general. He is now chief justice of the island. ... Individual blacks of exceptional quality, like Frederick Douglas in America, or the Chief Justice of Barbadoes,[25] will avail themselves of opportunities to rise ..." (pp.124-125).

The opportunities to rise were not many. Most nineteenth century secondary schools financed from public funds were established after 1870. They were few in number: in Trinidad for example, as late as 1902 only Queen's Royal College (120 students) was wholly maintained by the Government; St. Mary's College (200 pupils in 1902) had been affiliated since 1870 and received a small grant-in-aid. But in both these schools, fees were payable and fixed at £15 a year per pupil, reducing to £12 for each of two of the same family, and £9 a year for each of three or more of the same family.[26] "This meant that secondary education was for the middle classes who could pay for it; in fact the monied group was white and fair-skinned so that the question of colour has often been raised in connection with admission to secondary schools" (Gordon p.239). A Special Report of 10th October, 1889 by William Miles, then principal of Queen's Royal College described the

---

[25]Sir William Conrad Reeves (1821-1902) chief justice of Barbados from 1886; knighted 1889. Reeves' father was in fact a White man, a Dr. Philip Reeves. Since Froude goes on to claim that Reeves' association with the West had made him an un-typical Negro (and therefore no proof of "real" Negro capacity) it is surprising that the historian had not ferreted out the fact which would have been grist for his mill.

[26]Special Reports ... Vol. 12 see pp. 195 and 191

situation with peculiar authority: "What is done therefore for secondary Education in this Colony amounts to this that in its chief town only, professional men, Government Officers, ministers of religion and businessmen are able to get their sons a fairly good Grammar School education at a comparatively cheap rate."[27]

There was a certain amount of criticism of this privileged system by which one-third of the educational budget was spent on secondary education for a handful of boys whose parents were wealthy, but either not wealthy enough, or unwilling, to send them to England for their education; financial exclusiveness was buttressed by rules barring entry to the illegitimate, in practice the majority of Negro children. In the latter part of the century the authorities answered criticism by pointing to the existence of exhibition schemes by which pupils from the elementary schools could compete for two or three free places provided in the secondary establishments. But the standard of elementary education was poor, and continuity between the two levels was so little institutionalised, that only an exceptionally able and rigorously drilled pupil could qualify for an exhibition: in Trinidad in 1872 (January), twelve candidates presented themselves but only three of the six possible awards were made; in December, 1872, there were sixteen candidates but again, only three places were filled.[28] The Negro or Indian pupil who reached the required standard and got past the colour prejudice sometimes shown by the selection committees entered an exclusive arena where he could compete again for one of the few island scholarships available to British Universities.

The programme of training for the exhibitions to secondary schools was nothing short of criminal. How much the twentieth century is heir to the nineteenth in this respect becomes obvious when one sees V. S. Naipaul satirising the system in A House for Mr. Biswas (1961). In a section of the novel covering

---

[27]Source book p.245

[28]Source book p.244

the 1940's, Mr. Biswas' son Anand, placed on a special brain-food diet of milk and prunes, undergoes intense preparation: "With the exhibition examination less than two months away, Anand lived a life of pure work. Private lessons were given in the morning for half an hour before school; private lessons were given in the afternoon for an hour after school; private lessons were given for the whole of the Saturday morning. Then in addition to all these private lessons from his class teacher, Anand began to take private lessons from the headmaster, at the headmaster's house from five to six. He went from school to the Dairies to school again; then he went to the headmaster's where Savi waited for him with sandwiches and lukewarm Ovaltine. Leaving home at seven in the morning, he returned at half past six. He ate. Then he did his school homework; then he prepared for all his private lessons" (p.418). Naipaul's fictional account of the 1940's is of a piece with an autobiographical recollection of an earlier period - around 1910 - when C. L. R. James the distinguished historian, political theorist and commentator on the West Indian cultural scene won an exhibition (out of four available) to Queen's Royal College. James, a hot favourite, was to disappoint those who backed him for the island scholarship, but in Beyond a Boundary (1963) there is a very suggestive description of his trial run for the exhibition. "On the day of the examination a hundred boys were brought from all parts of the island by their teachers like so many fighting-cocks. That day I looked at the favourites and their trainers with wide-open eyes, for I was a country bumpkin. My father, when asked about me always dismissed the enquiry with the remark, 'I only brought him along to get him accustomed to the atmosphere.'" Naipaul's description of the examination day in A House for Mr. Biswas also runs to the language of sport, but it begins in religious terms and evokes the sights and smells of the occasion first: "The exhibition candidates, prepared for years for the sacrificial day, had all dressed for the sacrifice. They all wore serge

shorts, white shirts and school ties, and Anand could only guess at what charms these clothes concealed. Their pockets were stuffed with pens and pencils. In their hands they carried blotters, rulers, erasers and new pots of ink; some carried complete cases of mathematical instruments; many wore wrist-watches. The schoolyard was full of Daddies, the heroes of so many English compositions; they seemed to have dressed with as much care as their sons. The boys looked at the Daddies; and the Daddies, wrist-watchless, eyed each other, breeders of rivals." (p.425). In the nineteenth century there were not as many as one hundred candidates assembled nor was there such a concourse as Naipaul describes but the devotion and rivalries were undoubtedly as intense.

The route through the government exhibitions was the most spectacular for the children of the poor, but it was not the only heroic one. A few parents must have scraped and sacrificed much to see their eldest or favourite or only son through secondary school. There was of course a strong element of gratuitous fulfilment in such enterprises, and it would be easy to score off the would-be middle-class aspirations involved, but it is more important, in passing, to avoid such explanations or judgments and recognise the proportion of martyrdom poor parents had to undergo if their children were to enter the secondary schools without an exhibition. Once again, novels dealing with the twentieth century illustrate the process. In George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960) Belinda a prostitute ruthlessly expels an unsatisfied black client because a more profitable American customer has appeared:

> The man stood dumb. He wanted to say something, but words were not easy to come by as he looked at Belinda.
> 'I don't know what all the new freedom mean,' she said, 'cause they all crooks the political lot, all crooks, but I see how things start to change. An' I decide to back my little boy future. I go back it, like a horse to win I go back it.'
> The man saw her turn inside, and the door closed. You could have strangled him with an infant's breath.

Alone, sweeping the broken glass under the bed, Belinda paused and looked up at the ceiling.

'Jesus an' all the saints,' she cried, 'I loyal as any to my own kind. But you know, you know I didn't send him 'way for fun. You know my purpose is clean. It clean, clean.'

And she was ready for the night: this night which was her faith in the little boy's future. (Season of Adventure, p.199)

In choosing illustrations from works dealing with the twentieth century I do not wish to give the impression that the provision of secondary education in the nineteenth century was the same as in the later period or that there were as many aspirants in the nineteenth as in the twentieth century. But it seems important to stress that the price at which secondary education was purchased for the socially depressed in the nineteenth century, and the needs to which this education was sought as an answer shaped the attitudes of the products away from the possibility of a literary culture (which would have brought neither social prestige nor financial advancement). The Cambridge Local examinations to which the secondary schools were tied provided discontented recruits for the teaching profession and self-important clerks for government and commercial offices. But there were more glittering prizes. "Every year the two schools [Queen's Royal College and St. Mary's, the Catholic College] competed for three island scholarships worth £600 each. With one of these a boy could study law or medicine and return to the island with a profession and therefore independence. There were at that time few other roads to independence for a black man who started without means. The higher posts in the Government, in engineering and other scientific professions were monopolised by white people, and, as practically all business was also in their hands, the coloured people were, as a rule, limited to the lower posts. Thus law and medicine were the only way out. Lawyers and doctors made large fees and enjoyed great social prestige. The final achievement was when the Governor nominated one of these coloured men to the Legislative Council to represent the people. To what degree he represented them should not distract us here. We must

keep our eye on the course: exhibition, scholarship, profession, wealth, Legislative Council and the title of Honourable. Whenever someone brought it off the local people were very proud of him."[29] James' clear description relates to the first decade of the twentieth century but the patterns it distinguishes - the persistently materialistic approach to education in the West Indies in the twentieth century, and the emergence of a black middle class alienated from the people - were shaped in the nineteenth century.

Even those secondary school graduates who only obtained office jobs or became school-teachers held jealously on to their limited privilege. The individual blacks who had distinguished themselves were so few in number, and as a general rule so isolated from one another that a concerted leadership of the people would have been impracticable. But this question never really arose: those who had "made it" knew or felt that political power was held beyond their grasp, and in any case, they were too insecure in their positions of eminence to risk a backward glance at the depressed and inarticulate masses. A Dr. London judging horticultural exhibitions was always, in the nineteenth century, more likely than a Rev. Moore trying to rouse his fellow Negroes to action and achievement.

In what seemed a hopeless social and political situation, the pressure upon better-off blacks to consolidate their status as individuals left little energy or motivation to do much else. It is not surprising that few Negroes cultivated the art of reading imaginative literature in the nineteenth century and fewer still attempted to write it. "Fifty years after Emancipation", writes P. H. Daly, "there were four poets writing in British Guiana. They were Thomas Elliott, Sandiford Blades, Leo [Egbert Martin], S. E. Wills, and among them Leo was the great popular god of his age and soil. They were the early poets or, as I call them the Revivalists. Revivalists because they were attempting to revive

---

[29] C. L. R. James Beyond a Boundary (1963) p.31

interest in poetry after the blight of slavery."[30]

With as much sorrow as anger, Daly declares the Revivalists to have been spiritually weak. They "could find no inspi ation in their ancestry" because "they had been taught that their freedom came as a gift". They were incapable of a truly Revivalist Literature or Revivalist Politics because after the physical and spiritual blood-letting of slavery "they had been educated to thank God for having been emancipated from the slave shanties to the capitalist slums!" This was the source of the Revivalists' weakness and the extent of their failure, for it was their irresponsibility "to envisage the emergent society" and destroy "this new slavery of the spirit". Daly sums up the Revivalists as a group lacking vision, "they didn't see the significance of their freedom, nor the gigantic upheaval of fundamental values around them, because they didn't look." Turning to Leo in the same critical spirit, Daly pronounces him "a brooding recluse", out of place at a time when "a school of poets without complexes" were called for. Leo was too concerned with his own personal problems: his longest poem Ruth was well suited to social criticism, for it is "the story of a worker who, unable to support his wife Ruth, tries seeking gold in Venezuela. He dies trying. When Ruth gets the news, she dies from the shock." But, Daly concludes, Leo turned away from the social implications of his material to become "what he remains in the history of our literature - a prophet of frustration and confused sex-romanticism which, one might almost believe, remained unsatisfied."

I do not wish at this point to challenge the uncomprising, doctrinaire approach to literature of which Daly is an exponent, except to note that the involvement of West Indian writing in the twentieth century with social and political matters has been a source both of strength and of weakness and that

---

[30] P. H. Daly West Indian Freedom and West Indian Literature The Daily Chronicle Ltd., Georgetown 1951. At the time of writing this chapter, dates and publications of the poets listed had not come to hand. I have had to limit myself to an argument centring upon Daly's twenty-eight page booklet.

much depends on the artistic skill of particular authors. Daly's account of Leo and the Revivalist poets concentrates on their lack of vision but it is clear from the discussion that the case is more simple - "they didn't look". This aspect of the disconnection of the would-be man of letters from the depressed public around him is prominent in the account of S. E. Wills. Leo was a coloured man - only part Negro - who was educated, but as far as can be made out he was not University trained; Wills was a pure Negro and "an eminent lawyer". Wills drew his inspiration from, and wrote banteringly about the workingclass follies of the groups below him, but he was "never disturbed by the profounder problems of his day ... the least among our four major poets to be concerned with the significance of the freedom he inherited. Such enquiry, though not beyond the power of his intellect, was beyond the frontier of his interest." Wills consciously and deliberately excluded "every vestige of his period's problem from his work." He was a "Suppressionist", and for the "Suppressionists" who avoided "things real but repelling", Daly has nothing but scorn: "In their presence we feel irritated. They force us to lift up our voices and scream that their expenditure of effort is stale, flat, fraudulent."

However just Daly's strictures on the two nineteenth century poets may sound now, it seems fair to point out that these arise out of an application of more easily held mid-twentieth century political attitudes to a less predictable nineteenth century situation. On the other hand, the fact remains that the work of both Leo and Wills lacks social realism and shows little involvement with the depressed masses. In this way these writers express the alienation of the embryonic black middle-class in the nineteenth century from the uneducated and illiterate groups to which they or their parents had belonged.

In the growth of a literature, the poets, either through oral tradition or in writing, seem to come first. While there were a few nineteenth century

writers of verse, there does not appear to have been a black novelist in the period. To a large extent, explanations lie in the shortcomings of popular education which failed to produce a literate public in the nineteenth century, and the way in which education was tied up with larger social questions. But if the life without fiction of the underprivileged in the nineteenth century may be approached in these terms, another kind of argument arises when we look at the Whites and Coloureds in the society (for whom education was a possibility) and their failure to produce or read much fiction before 1900.

(ii) The Whites and the Coloureds

The Whites in the West Indies were classified by Bryan Edwards[31] and Edward Long[32] as "European Whites" and "Creole or Native Whites". This distinction was technically appropriate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when there were regular arrivals from Europe whose manners and attitudes would have been, at first at any rate, quite different from those of the Whites who had been born in the islands. But even for these periods it seems better to think in terms of "absentee Whites" and "Creole or Native Whites". For many new arrivals, released from their restraining settings, were quick to go native and adopt the less inhibited ways of the Creoles. Moreover, in beginning to speak about absentee Whites, one lays the foundation for discussing absenteeism as a physical and as a psychological phenomenon, the most important deterrent to the formation of a West Indian society or West Indian nation.

Froude's denunciation of the English in the West Indies is a proper starting point for discussing the absentee plantation owners and the White aristocracy of the sugar islands: "The English come as birds of passage and depart when they

---

[31]Bryan Edwards The History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies (1798). All quotations come from the fifth edition of 1819.

[32]Edward Long The History of Jamaica (1774)

have made their fortunes."[33] According to Long there were 2,000 absentee Jamaican proprietors in 1774. It is difficult to say what percentage of the total number of proprietors these represented or what proportion of the land they owned. But working from Long's scattered information, it is possible to deduce that the absentees constituted not fewer than 20% of the proprietors: the fact that these were absentee meant that in most cases they could afford to be, so that it is likely they owned much more than 20% of the property in the islands. The number of absentees was increased over the years by inheritance: a planter in the islands might will his estate to an heir in Britain who would have had no interest in residing on his property. And when Emancipation ruined many small plantation owners their properties fell into the hands of creditors in Britain who had never or would never see the islands.

Absenteeism was thus a prominent feature in the West Indian system. The absentees were usually richer, and it is probable that they were better educated and less philistine than the proprietors who remained. If one is inclined to imagine that they would have shaped the society in a more civilised way than those who were left as leaders in the islands, however, it is equally possible to speculate that they might have constructed a South Africa in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to dream what influence men like "Monk" Lewis and William Beckford the historian (absentee proprietors) might have had on the intellectual life of the White community, and in what ways the existence of a cultivated upper class in the islands might have made for the rapid development of the whole society after Emancipation. But these are the might-have-beens in a past whose finer possibilities were always neglected for the seediest alternative.

---

[33] James Anthony Froude The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses (1887).

The early emigration of those who had made their West Indian fortunes, and the prolonged absences or non-arrival of those who later came into possession of West Indian wealth and property, gave material sanction to the idea that Britain was home and the islands a shining hunting ground. Once this idea was firmly impressed in economic terms, it began to grow in the Creole consciousness as the redeeming myth of every sordid enterprise or lack of enterprise.

In 1831, A. H. Beaumont, a white Jamaican journalist had written in The Jamaica Petition for Representation in the British House of Commons or for Independence: "The haughty aristocrats who have property in that Island, and who may obtain seats in the House of Commons have no community of interest, no identity of feeling with the resident inhabitants of Jamaica; to these aristocrats, what may become of the people of that country is and ever must be a matter of perfect inconsequence so long as they can ... retain in England what they call their station in society ..."[34] The native Whites or Creoles (those born in the islands) were the first West Indians, but not because of the sour-grape or economically interested nationalism they voiced occasionally against their absentee rivals. It was because, in adjusting to the West Indian environment, they had evolved a way of life that was not quite European (which, following Curtin, one might call "Euro-Jamaican"). As early as 1774, Long had recognised this. In The History of Jamaica, Long discusses the White Creoles in detail. He describes them as "sensible, of quick apprehensions, brave, good-natured, affable, generous, temperate and sober; unsuspicious, lovers of freedom, fond of social enjoyments, tender fathers, humane and indulgent masters." At home "their tables are covered with plenty of good cheer and they pique themselves on regaling their guests with a profusion of viands; their hospitality is unlimited ..." In company "they affectgaiety and diversions which in general are cards, billiards, backgammon, chess, horse-racing, hog-hunting, shooting, fishing, dancing and music."[35]

---

[34]Quoted by Philip Curtin in Two Jamaicas, Harvard University Press (1955) p.51

[35]Long, Vol. II, p.265.

Class distinctions among the White Creoles were not rigid, because of the need to maintain closed ranks against a massive slave population, but three main levels are usually recognised: the local plantocracy, the merchant and professional groups, and the overseers, book-keepers and indentured white servants. It is obvious that Long was describing the gracious lives of the plantocracy.

Bryan Edwards in The History ... also writes about this group. He notes "the early display of mental powers in young children exceeding those of European infants of the same age", but does not accept the theory of rapid decline based upon an anology with the vegetable kingdom; and in the same defensive section[36] he takes up the charges of indolence and licentiousness among the Creoles: "It is indeed certain that the subsequent acquirements of the mind in the Natives (Europeans) do not always keep pace with its early progress; but the chief cause ... of the short duration of such promising beginnings seems to be the want of proper objects for exercising the faculties. The propensity also which the climate undoubtedly encourages to early and habitual licentiousness induces a turn of mind and disposition unfriendly to mental improvement. Among such of the Natives as have happily escaped the contagion and enervating effects of youthful excesses, men are found of capacities as strong and permanent as among any people whatever.... Indolence, I admit, is too predominant among them. ... Even the indolence of which they are accused is rather an aversion to serious thought and deep reflection than a slothfulness and sluggishness of nature."

An earlier observer had not been inclined to plaster over the shortcomings and the spiritual poverty of the White Creoles:

> Learning here is at the lowest Ebb; there is no publick School in the whole Island, neither do they seem fond of the Thing; several large Donations have been made for such Uses but have never taken Effect. The Office of a Teacher is look'd upon as contemptible, and no Gentleman keeps Company with one of their Character; to read, write and cast up

---

[36] Edwards, Vol. II, Bk. IV, pp. 15 and 17

> Accounts is all the Education they desire, and even these are scurvily taught. A Man of any Parts or Learning that would employ himself in that Business would be despised and starve.[37]

The White Creoles built no schools, libraries or museums. They created no works of art. They constructed no roads or bridges. They left no enduring monuments.

> Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,
> Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candledust,
> Remain to file the lizard's dragonish claws;
> The mouths of those gate cherubs streaked with stain.
> Axle and coachwheel silted under the muck
> Of cattle droppings.
> Three crows flap for the trees,
> And settle, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.
> A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose
> The leprosy of Empire.
> 'Farewell, green fields'
> Farewell, ye happy groves!'[38]

Too much can be made of the isolation of this relatively small group in precarious control of a discontented slave population as an explanation of their material excesses and spiritual aridity. Nor can indolence and licentiousness and the lack of mental stamina be held as an original cause. In commenting on the practice of the wealthier Creoles of sending their children to Britain to be educated, Long raises the more fundamental question of orientation: "Let me now ask, what are the mighty advantages which Britain, or the colony, has gained by the many hundreds who have received their education in the former? The answer may be, they have spent their fortunes in Britain, and learned to renounce their native place, their parents and their friends. Would it not have been better for both countries, that three fourths of them never crossed the Atlantic? Their industry is, in general, for ever lost to the place where it might have been usefully exerted." According to Long, the education of these 'been-to's' is not only wasted: "Of the many students at law, natives of Jamaica, who after

---

[37] C. Leslie A New and Exact Account of Jamaica (1740) pp. 36-37

[38] Derek Walcott "Ruins of a Great House" from In a Green Night (1962)

completing their terms in London have returned to assume the gown, I have not heard of one who ever gained £5 a year by his practice." The effect of their stay in Britain is to create a "riveted prejudice against colony life": "They generally leave Britain at that critical age when the blood beats high. They regret their exile from the gay delights of London, from the connections of early friendship, and perhaps from the attachments of love. The impressions of all these remain lively and forcible."[39]

It is too simple to argue that absenteeism had drained off the educated class and the leisured class. And to say that the White Creoles were torn by the sense of exile which they themselves had cultivated is only an extenuating way of recognising, that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the West Indies was regarded only as a temporary lodging place by its White inhabitants. As early as 1740, discussing thefailure of White Creoles to build schools, Leslie had recognised that there was no patriotism: "Tis a Pity, in a Place like this where the Means could be so easily afforded, something of a public Nature should not be done for the Advantage of Posterity; but when such a Spirit will appear is hard to determine."[40] And Long, in an extended discussion[41] viewed the absence of a proper seminary for the young inhabitants of the island as an unhappy defect, "one of the principal impediments to its effectual settlement." Protesting that "it has too long been the custom for every father here who has acquired a little property to send his children of whatever complexion, to Britain for education" Long urged the necessity of weaning "the inhabitants from that detrimental habit of emigration, that unhappy idea of considering this place a mere temporary abode." After pointing to the sharp contrast with North America where "the lowest of their people are not left destitute for some education", the historian moves into a sentimental picture of the sufferings of parents and

---

[39]Long Vol. II, pp. 248 and 249

[40]Leslie p.37

[41]Long Vol. II pp.246-260

children separated from one another because of the need to travel to England for education. Then comes a stirring peroration in which Long appeals to the patriotic instinct: "What blessings then will await that assembly who shall patriotically resolve to prevent this barbarous necessity and these sorrowful events in future! They will indeed be justly styled the fathers of their country, and merit immortal honour."

This rousing call had no effect. By the time that Long was writing, indeed, the physical absenteeism of the early West Indians had not only consolidated itself, it had become internalised so that even for the White Creoles England was home, the West Indies was never the loved place. Since the West Indies was not home, anything could be done there. Morals and manners deteriorated: "The Europeans, who at home have always been used to greater purity and strictness of manners, are too easily led aside to give a loose to every kind of sensual delight: on this account, some black or yellow quasheba is sought for by whom a tawny breed is produced. Many are the men of every rank, quality and degree here who would much rather riot in these goatish embraces than share the pure and lawful bliss derived from matrimonial, mutual love. Modesty, in this respect, has but very little footing here."[42] Since England was the acknowledged and proud centre of art and culture, it was not necessary to renovate the sunny slum. Observer after observer of the West Indian scene was drawn to comment on this irresponsible attitude of the Whites in the islands. In 1825, Henry Nelson Coleridge wrote: "They call England their home, though many of them have never been there; they talk of writing home, and going home and pique themselves more on knowing the result of a contested election in England than on mending the roads, establishing a police or purifying a prison."[43]

---

[42] Long, Vol. II p.328

[43] Henry Nelson Coleridge, Six Months in the West Indies in 1825, (1826). Quoted by F. Collymore in The Tamarock Review, Toronto, Issue Fourteen, Winter 1960

And in 1859 Anthony Trollope was astonished: "Nothing is more peculiar than the way in which the word 'home' is used in Jamaica, and indeed all through the West Indies. With the white people it always signifies England, even though the person using the word has never been there. I could never trace the use of the word in Jamaica as applied by white men or white women to the home in which they lived, not even though that home had been the dwelling of their fathers as well as of themselves. The word 'home' with them is sacred, and means something holier than a habitation in the tropics."[44]

It is impossible to separate economic and political realities from the developing myth of England as the centre of West Indian cultural and social life. As the image of England as the place of values grew more mythic, the condition of the West Indies as a spiritual sepulchre became more true. H. G. de Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall (1929), set in the Jamaica of the 1830's, provides a useful illustration of this complex. The arrival of a young Englishman Robert Rutherford allows de Lisser to show the difference between the Creole White and the newly arrived European. Rutherford's liaison with two women, Annie Palmer (a white) and Millie a coloured girl, is a marker of his rapid decline in the steamy atmosphere. Rutherford begins to take to drink, but the contact with Rider, an alchoholic minister now de-frocked, who had deteriorated in the tropics, proves a steadying influence to both men. After a particularly disgusting demonstration by the Creole woman Annie Palmer, Rider who is aware of Rutherford's mounting distress, begins to take some stock of the total situation. His reflections provide a resume of the quality of life in the islands among the White Creoles:

> Today it came into his mind that perhaps, if he could get back to England, he might be able to open another and better chapter of his life. He

---

[44] Anthony Trollope At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies (1859) p.99

thought of Robert; he too if he remained in Jamaica, might become if not an outcast (for he had means), at any rate a poor specimen of a man; he had seen such things. Robert would have a good career at home. It was better that he should return as quickly as possible. ... In the tropics some men throve; those were the men of stern fibre or of a sort of brutal hardness. These tropics with their large servile population and small aristocracy of proprietors who lived in a world of the narrowest mental and moral horizons - what a horror they actually were. If they did not become physically the white man's grave, they formed for him as deadly a spiritual sepulchre. (The White Witch of Rosehall, p.192)

De Lisser is not a major West Indian artist, but as an illustrator, in the novel form, of the facts and issues in West Indian slave society, he is unequalled. At the end of The White Witch of Rosehall, the prolonged contrast between the Creole image of England as home and civilised place, and the picture of Jamaica as the place of corruption, is clinched by a short exchange between an old parson and Robert Rutherford (who is about to escape to England):

'Do you think you will ever come back to the West Indies?' asked the old parson by way of saying something.
'Never' was the reply.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emigration, not social reform, was the way out of a corroding environment chosen by the very people whose concerted efforts might have helped to redress the evils of the past.

Seeking to modify James Stephen's censure that "There is no civilised Society on earth so entirely destitute of learned leisure, of literary and scientific intercourse and even of liberal recreations" as Jamaica, a usually trustworthy commentator, Philip Curtin, is led into a certain amount of sophistry.[45] The "lack of a decent educational system" was, indeed one of the principal drawbacks of Jamaican intellectual life but the lack of any system at all, while admittedly worsening the nineteenth century condition, was essentially a symptom, not a cause of the poverty of Jamaican civilisation. And Curtin's carefully measured assertion that there were "a modest but adequate number of newspapers, libraries, improvement societies, schools, periodicals and book publishers in the 1830's"

---

[45] See Curtin Two Jamaicas pp. 56-60

is deceptive, for by his own account, the quality of these was never high, the number of people they affected was small, and the ideas being disseminated were received from the outside. The stubbornly philistine state of the ruling class in West Indian society is implied in the fact that Sheridan's Jamaica Monthly Magazine, which aimed to improve the island's literary taste, collapsed after being published at a loss between 1832 and 1834.

A good illustration of the difficulties, and the limited aims of the magazine publishers in the West Indies during the nineteenth century (when the home vs hunting-ground pattern was already well-established) may be drawn from The Jamaica Quarterly Journal and Literary Gazette/ Conducted by a Society of Gentlemen, the first issue of which appeared in July 1818. The Journal does not appear to have lasted more than two years,[46] although Vol. I No. I carries the names of just over 450 subscribers.

In the Advertisement, the editors made the kind of appeal most likely to succeed with the planters, even indulging in a certain amount of comfortable and light banter: "Although a residence in this island is too often forced and deemed an exile from the parent country; and most persons, therefore, during their stay here are anxious to glean little but golden grains, yet it admits not of a doubt but that many useful hints might be afforded, even towards the accomplishment of that universal project." A substantial part of the magazine catered for the interests of planters and agriculturists.

Although the editors suggested that the magazine might also carry the results of "philosophical /scientific/ inquiry which in this most fertile region has lain waste so long", the contents of available numbers show that no "Geologist, Mineralogist or Botanist" was forthcoming.

As the failure of Sheridan's Jamaica Monthly Magazine was to demonstrate, an exclusively literary magazine was out of the question in the sugar islands.

---

[46] I have seen only four issues, belonging to 1818 and 1819, at the British Museum.

The editors of The Jamaica Quarterly Journal, with an eye clearly focused on the possible subscribers, conceived of a literary section frankly as a means of conveying information about books-in-the-news at home: "Those also who thus far removed from the sources of publication have not collections of books within their reach - to such, some notice of the literary events of the day may afford amusement and instruction." No. II of the Journal (Dec. 1818) contained a long article "Memoirs of the Public and Private Life of the Right Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan" under the heading of "Literature - Original Criticism". And in the section for Poetry, there were six pieces: "Lines of a beautiful Cottage"; "To a Young Lady"; "Hopeless Love"; "On seeing the last rose of the season hanging on a tree"; "Smiles"; and "Jeu d'Esprit". The interest in literature, judging from this magazine, was not only small; where it was not turned towards England, it was trifling.

The absence of any tradition of artistic and scientific endeavour in White Creole society meant that when Emancipation came there were no models evolved in the islands to which the liberated slaves or their caretakers could either turn or, in revolt, turn away from. So it is that the orientation of White West Indians towards England as an educational and cultural focus came to be institutionalised in a derivative and unrealistic system of popular education imported from England, and a cultural bias, implicit in the colonial relationship, could never find a challenge from within West Indian Society. I shall turn to some of the consequences of these elements in the colonial's structure of awareness in the third section of this chapter, when factors behind the emigration of West Indian writers to London are discussed. It is necessary to state at this point however, that the similarity between the intellectual and cultural states of the labouring classes in nineteenth century England, and the liberated slaves in the West Indies is misleading. The existence of a cultured class in England from the time of Chaucer

and earlier, setting a tone for the society and representing its finer aspirations, meant that, however tenuously, the English working man was in contact with a tradition waiting to be democratised. In the background of the liberated slave was a cultural void.

I want now to look at the place of the Coloureds in this arid situation.

The proportion of Coloureds to Whites in Jamaica was not small in the latter years of the eighteenth century, and by 1844, they outnumbered the Whites overwhelmingly.[47] They had also grown in influence, so that as early as 1859, Anthony Trollope could foresee that they would soon dominate the islands: "Let any stranger go through the shops and stores of Kingston, and see how many of them are either owned or worked by men of colour; let him go into the House of Assembly and see how large a proportion of their debates is carried on by men of colour. ... How large a portion of the public service is carried on by them; how well they thrive ..."[48] But neither in the eighteenth nor in the nineteenth century did the Coloureds fill the gap left by the Whites and assume the role of cultural pace-setters in the West Indies. This is hardly surprising.

In the first place, there is more than an element of nonsense in speaking about a Coloured class: in complexion, they ranged from near-White to indistinguishable from Black; some were wealthy and owned property, some were well-educated, and many were as poor and illiterate as Negroes. Throughout the eighteenth century, and up to the 1830's, they had been subject to disability laws. The Coloureds who achieved social prominence in the eighteenth century were few, and when they began to gain numerical strength around the turn of the century, most of their energies were taken up in the fight to obtain civil rights for their class.

---

47 According to Edwards there were 10,000 Coloureds and 30,000 Whites around 1798. In 1844 according to the first Census there were 69,000 Coloureds and only 15,000 Whites in post-Emancipation Jamaica.

48 Anthony Trollope The West Indies and the Spanish Main (1859) p.78

The career of Edward Jordon[49](1800-1869) beginning in the 1820's and terminating just about the time when the Jamaican Legislature voluntarily surrendered the Constitution and reduced the country to Crown colony status, illustrates, in a convenient way, the public issues with which his class were engaged, and thus offers a part of the explanation for their non-involvement, on the whole, in artistic and scientific pursuits. In the 1820's, Jordon was Secretary of a secret (at first) society to resist the oppression of coloured people. In 1823, the society was strong enough to petition the Jamaica House of Assembly for "full participation by free people of colour in the political life of the Island." When this failed they sent, in 1827, two prominent men of mixed blood, Richard Hill and Alexander Dawson Simpson, to present the petition in England. The failure and frustration of this mission intensified the public campaign in the island. In 1829, accordingly, Jordon began publishing a semi-weekly called the Watchman and Jamaica Free Press, in which the civil rights issue was hotly agitated. Within three years, the Watchman had made many political enemies, and an editorial containing the sentence "knock off the fetters, and let the oppressed go free" brought Jordon to court on charges of sedition and treason. While this prosecution was still going on, Jordon was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment for libelling Rev. James Wordie of the Scotch Kirk, Kingston, who had attacked him on the "knock off the fetters" issue. The verdict was eventually reversed, but Jordon had already served half the sentence. No sooner was he released than he issued a violent circular demanding "the instant repeal of every restrictive law, the removal of every disability, and the extension of complete equality, declaring that if the demand were not complied with, the whole coloured population would rise in arms, would proclaim freedom to their own slaves, instigate the slaves

---

[49]Quotations relating to Jordon come from the biographical sketch in W. Adolphe Roberts' Six Great Jamaicans, Kingston, 1952

generally to rebellion, and then shout war and wage it, until the streets of Kingston should run blood." The slaves would have been useful indeed. But the Assembly, thus reminded of the necessity to make allies of the Coloureds against a restive slave population, at last granted the men of colour full civic and political rights.

Jordon's advancement after this victory, was phenomenal. The rebel, predictably, became a pillar of conservative respectability. After winning a seat in the House in 1835, Jordon became "a vestryman in the parish of St. Andrew, a lieutenant in the Kingston militia and an assistant judge of the Court of Common pleas in Kingston. He also branched out as a businessman, became manager of the Kingston Savings Bank in 1839 and a director of the Planter's Bank in 1841. Two years later he accepted a commission as lieutenant in the St. Andrew militia. Jordon was, in due course, made a Companion of the Bath by Queen Victoria, and after becoming Speaker took ultimate political honours as Island Secretary, a post that became a perquisite of Englishmen under the Crown Colony system. But Jordon died a bitter man. In the White panic after the Morant Bay uprising, the Assembly, urged by Governor Eyre, gave up the Constitution and restored the country to Colonial status, as a way, allegedly, of putting off Negro control. Jordon supported this measure on the paradoxical ground that the Mother Country would take better care of the Negroes than an autonomous Assembly might have. One suspects Jordon of hypocrisy at this point. But the crucial twist came when Jordon realised that in supporting the surrender of self-rule, he had helped the Whites to keep not the Negroes, but his own Coloured class from obtaining supreme power in the land.

Using Jordon's later career as the case of spectacular fulfilment but ultimate defeat, it is just to conclude that the Coloureds were more interested in the outer elements of social and political advancement than in the

cultivation of the inner man. The campaign for civil rights had after all, been a campaign for freedom to be "White".

In some cases this fantasy penetrated to the deepest levels of the Coloured personality, and led to difficult problems of adjustment with both Whites and Blacks in the society. Social comment from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are curiously of a piece. Bryan Edwards had noted in The History[50] "this mischief arising from the system of rigour ostensibly maintained by the laws against this unfortunate race of people, that it tends to degrade them in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the community to which they belong." Later in the same work Edwards describes their behaviour towards Whites and Blacks: "In their deportment towards the White people they are humble, submissive, and unassuming. Their spirits seem to sink under the consciousness of their condition. They are accused, however, of proving bad masters when invested with power; and their conduct towards their slaves is said to be in a high degree harsh and imperious." Fifty years later, Anthony Trollope was to find that the Negroes were antipathetic to the bullying mulatto[51] and had located his delusion: "A negro, as a rule, will not serve a mulatto when he can serve a European or a White Creole. He thinks that the mulatto is too near akin to himself to be worthy of any respect. In his passion he calls him a nigger - and protests that he is not, and never will be like buckra man." In their relationships with White men, Trollope could see, there was bravado, but it only covered over a sense of inferiority: "They are by no means humble in their gait and their want of meekness sets their white neighbours against them. They are always proclaiming by their voice and their look that they are as good as the white man; but they are always showing by their voice and look also that they know that this is a false boast."[52]

---

[50] In Vol. II pp. 23 and 25

[51] The mulatto is, strictly, the offspring of one White and one Black parent but I shall use the term to include any Coloured who did not pass for White.

[52] The West Indies and the Spanish Main p. 82

The removal of civil disabilities did not eliminate social attitudes to the man of mixed blood. To the political and social disabilities of the Coloureds one has to add therefore, the phychological disturbance of the mulatto well into the nineteenth century, as a deterrent to their emergence as a minority group bringing sweetness and light to the society.

The Fictional Image of the Mulatto

If the Coloureds did not read or write fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their peculiar position of stress has made them of great interest to writers of modern West Indian fiction. Almost without exception the literary presentations either derive from or consolidate the kind of comment quoted above from Edwards and Trollope, so that two stereotypes of the Coloured person - the unstable mulatto (usually male) and the highly sexed and sensuous Coloured woman - have solidified in West Indian writing. In an area like the West Indies where many races live side by side, and where vested political interests thrive on racial divisions or misunderstandings, the common substitution in works of fiction of racial types for characters conceived either on the more inclusive basis exemplified in the conventional manner by the universal Mr. Biswas or in open experimental terms by the Harrisian unified crew, is a creative failing of considerable social consequence. In discussing the fictional image of a specific caste - the mulattoes - I shall restrict myself to isolating the elements in the image and considering some questions of art in a literary way, but the broader issues arising from the use of stereotypes in West Indian writing in general will be very much in my mind.

I shall take the unstable mulatto from three works: Sylvia Winter's The Hills of Hebron (1962), John Hearne's short story, At the Stelling (1960) and Alvin Bennett's novel God the Stonebreaker (1964). The Hills of Hebron is an over-loaded work by a West Indian intellectual anxious to touch upon as many themes as possible. The mulatto makes his appearance in the chapter called "The legend"

when the Reverend Richard Brooke and his wife Cecilia appear as the missionary couple to the Cockpit Centre community. Miss Wynter makes the usual anti-English points but the main interest at this stage is in the attitude of the mulatto deacon James Macleod to the White woman: "Mrs. Brooke was tall, slim, with blue eyes, golden hair and a soft pink complexion; and was therefore extremely beautiful in the deacon's eyes. But she did not attract him as a woman. Only as a symbol. Conquest of her would prove that his father's white blood had cancelled out the black blood of his mother." Having explained the character in these terms, the author moves swiftly to the point where the mulatto, who imagines on no evidence that Mrs. Brooke wants him sexually, decides to bring matters to a head. A well-timed afternoon visit finds the Reverend's wife alone, and helpfully, taking a nap:

> When the maid woke her she dressed hastily and went into the drawing-room wondering at the deacon's coming at that hour, alarmed that some mishap might have befallen her husband. She entered the room. The deacon strode across to her and pulled her to him. The smell of the coconut oil on his hair was sharply acrid in her nostrils. She was overcome by a sudden nausea and pushed him away. He swung out of the house, hurt to the quick. She was a white bitch like all the others, he told himself, and thought herself too good for him only because he was part black.
>
> (The Hills of Hebron, p.123)

The Hills of Hebron is full of documentary excesses and artistic deficiencies. The hurried thinness of this passage detracts from its credibility; and the urge to illustrate the mulatto yearning for whiteness and mulatto touchiness about ancestry, is fulfilled only at the price of failing to animate the fictional character. Miss Wynter does not even glimpse the comic possibility of her deacon as bungling seducer or half-hearted rapist.

In another chapter[53] I have argued that Hearne, in At the Stelling, rides the stereotypes artfully, and I concentrated on the presentation of the Amerindian, John. Instead of repeating the argument here in relation to

---

[53] See Chapter III, pp.

Cockburn I shall simply dredge up one element in the stereotype of the mulatto which Hearne has built from, as a way of illustrating the continuity between documentary accounts and the fictional conception. Both Edwards and Trollope had noted how in their relationships with their social inferiors the mulattoes were domineering and harsh, since as Edwards had moralised "it is the general characteristic of human nature, that men whose authority is most liable to be disputed are the most jealous of any infringement of it, and the most vigilant in its support."[54] In the story, Cockburn's uncertainty is the uncertainty of any man suddenly entrusted with leadership, and his petty, domineering behaviour towards John, the proven man next-in-command, is a function of that uncertainty, but Hearne undoubtedly benefits from the reader's pre-existing image of the mulatto as socially insecure and hysterically determined upon keeping social inferiors in their place. Cockburn is madly concerned to impress upon John (who, gallingly to the mulatto has been a close friend of the previous leader, a White Creole) that "gang foreman is only gang foreman and that boss is always boss." But if Hearne's presentation of Cockburn depends upon and consolidates the stereotype it does so only ultimately; the story itself is free of the kind of documentary intent that restricts the novelist's art in The Hills of Hebron.

Sylvia Wynter's mulatto is a symptom, not a cause of the failure of The Hills of Hebron. In God the Stonebreaker, the mulatto is the rock upon which a promising novel comes to grief. In the early part of the book, where G.B. is the undisputed centre of interest, Bennett's touch is light and his control unobtrusive. G.B., a middle-aged spinster, grandmother, and versatile trickster lives off her wits in a slum area called Swine Lane. The depressing human and social environment in which she exists is never far from the surface of the novel, but Bennett manages to keep it at a comic distance. The manipulation of

---

[54]Edwards, The History, Vol. II, p.25

different registers of English (educated authorial paraphrase of dialect, and dialect-speaking character's attempt at educated speech) establishes and maintains a comic tone; the inflated authorial commentary lends an air of mock-heroic to the middle-aged heroine's exploits. In such a context the interview between G.B. and Quashie,[55] from whom she rents her shack, is not the expulsion of a helpless tenant by a heartless landlord as it might easily have been in a social protest novel, but an animated contest of tricksiness between the Anansi-like heroine and her involuntary creditor. Moreover, although G.B. is a creature ruled exclusively by self-interest, the author does not seek to persuade the reader to pass judgment upon her. Amoral and resilient, G.B. finds a thousand surprising ways of being herself, the author allowing the reader to delight in his versatile creation.

The creation of a character of such elasticity within the determining social framework is a considerable imaginative feat. But the performance is not sustained. An increasing interest in Panty, the heroine's grandson, puts G.B. in a supporting role for much of the second half of the novel. What makes this a disappointing development is that Bennett is interested in Panty only as a mulatto. Not only is Panty limited as a fictional character by the stereotype of the mulatto; his relationships with other characters are presented schematically as aspects of the mulatto's social maladjustment. Bennett's seizing upon Panty as mulatto is the signal for a more explicit concern with social issues. The comic tone begins to slip, and the authorial language starts to sound pretentious: "The glass globe sun exploded in the sky, scattering splinters of multi-coloured light. The larger particles assembled themselves into millions of galaxies. Inside Kate's breast the sun of hope exploded and splinters of pain floated around in her head." (p.167).

It would be difficult to establish by quotation that Panty as a fictional character is limited by the stereotypes. For the impression depends upon the

---

[55]See pp. 3-7

accumulation of mulatto trait upon predictable mulatto trait over a number of incidents in the novel. Moreover, some of the incidents by which Bennett illustrates the mulatto characteristics are very lively when seen in isolation. Such, in a small way is the incident that illustrates the insecure mulatto insisting on his social superiority. An aged woman comes to the office where Panty works and begs:

> 'Mi dear son, give your poor mother a penny to buy bread. Me is dying for 'ungry. You look like a very nice young massa. Me is pleased to see such a nice person working with govament.'
>
> Stealthily Panty threw her a quick glance to make sure that it was no one he knew and then he returned his undivided attention to his work. With her stick, the woman impatiently knocked on the counter menacingly, repeating her request a little louder than before.
>
> Indignantly, Panty addressed her: 'You come to beg, you should not be so rude to your superiors. I am not your son. Now go away!'
>
> (God the Stonebreaker, p.108)

The episode closes with a benediction of vituperative language against mulattoes.

Panty's relationship with the Allens, an English family, and their daughter Paula is also determined by the mulatto stereotype. Panty is the mulatto submissive before the indifferent or hostile White: "Conscious of Mrs. Allen's dislike for him, he assumed the vain task of trying to win her esteem. His devotion to this quite unnecessary undertaking was a feat of tolerance and self-effacement" (p.126). He is also the mulatto who wishes to be White. This is expressed in his desire to marry Paula Allen, the White girl. And it also shows itself in an aping of White ways. Connected with the mulatto desire to be White, is mulatto hypersensitivity about Black kinsfolk. The following passage economically summarises the mulatto characteristics which determine the presentation of Panty:

> To be like his superiors became Panty's dominating obsession, so he tried in deed and word to ape Parson Allen. Panty was often jeered at, and criticised for trying to be a 'black Englishman', but he felt that he was being deliberately persecuted on account of his humble antecedents. He rapidly became socially super-sensitive, developing much intolerance for his grandmother, whom he regarded as a social stumbling-block in his way.
>
> (God the Stonebreaker, p.104)

It is not very long before this stereotyped characterisation and the accompanying commentary begin to bore the reader. Panty never becomes a credible fictional character. In addition, Bennett's compulsive interest in "the mulatto" causes him to lose sight of G.B., his freely invented and more satisfactory character. What is worse, in trying to demonstrate the mulatto's ingratitude to his Black ancestors, Bennett unconvincingly alters the focus upon the earlier G.B. The resourceful and splendidly amoral trickster heroine is reduced and sentimentalised as the generous, unloved, and pathetic victim of mulatto callousness. From this violent dislocation God the Stonebreaker never recovers.

The continuity between the image of the mulatto male in modern West Indian fiction, and the documentary accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, would suggest either that there is a back-log of prejudice against this group, or that they still retain the unflattering characteristics of the past. However this may be, the literary presentations reinforce the view that the Coloureds could hardly have had the stability as a group to lay the foundations for a broad cultural tradition or for a literary tradition in the West Indies.

If the Coloured man was pushed in one shattering direction, the Coloured woman was pulled in another. Bryan Edwards had noted that the "accusation generally brought against the free people of colour, is the incontinency of their women; of whom, such as are young, and have tolerable persons are universally maintained by White men of all ranks and conditions as kept mistresses."[56] In Morgan's Daughter,[57] set in Jamaica of the 1780's, de Lisser illustrates the crushing effect of the disability laws against educated and wealthy Coloureds in general, but he does so from the exceptional point of view of a high-spirited, England-educated and property-owning Coloured woman. At one point in the novel, the heroine reflects upon her isolation and, as she scorns the lives of the women

---

[56] Edwards The History ... Vol. II p.25

[57] Published 1953

of mixed blood, she is used by de Lisser to describe the fate of most Coloured women up to the 1830's:

> She had been sent to England for her education at an age when she was fully aware of the gulf which separated her from the white ladies of the country; recognition from them she must never hope for; and not even formal courtesy. They would never meet. She might return to the island far better educated than any of them, beautiful - for she knew she was beautiful - proud, ambitious, able; but all that would count for nothing, unless perhaps for a disability. For from the women of mixed blood she was also cut off by the early advantages which a doting father had insisted should be hers. That they should become the mistresses of white men, or the wives of coloured men, and bear children, and eat and drink and laze and grow fat, seemed to them a sufficient life. At times they would attend the races in the gayest of apparel, on horseback or in chaises, or be guests at the periodical balls in the town given for them by white men. They would rear poultry, would attend to their housekeeping, and thus their lives would be passed, with the satisfaction provided by the knowledge that the haughty ladies of pure blood were bitterly jealous of them because of their stealing away of son or brother or husband. Maybe that suited them; she thought contemptuously that on the whole it did. But it was all repugnant to her ...
>
> (Morgan's Daughter, p.95)

In 1859 Trollope observed that the Coloured woman's acceptance of the position of mistress to the White man was not as frequent as it used to be, and that some Coloured women were even fashionably educated in the English manner. "They love dearly to shine; to run over the piano with quick and loud fingers; to dance with skill, which they all do, for they have good figures and correct ears; to know and display the little tricks and graces of English ladies - such tricks and graces as are to be learned between fifteen and seventeen at Ealing, Clapham and Hornsey."[58] In the account of popular education in the nineteenth century it was possible to omit reference to the education of Negro and Indian girls. On the whole, there was no provision for them. About half their number could expect two or three years at the elementary schools, and then life began. Coloured girls of the poorer classwere in a similar position. Some of the wealthier ones, as Trollope noted, were sent to England to be polished up. But the size of this educated group, and the kind of education they received, make

---

[58] Trollope pp. 87-88

it fair to hold that even in the nineteenth century the Coloured woman was not in a position to help shape a civilisation in the islands.

In modern West Indian fiction the Coloured woman as a type has not had as much celebration as the Black woman. And in those novels concerned with expressing social and racial cleavage, the type of the schizophrenic male mulatto has been a more magnetic focal point. Yvonne Huntly in Christopher Nicole's Off White (1959) is at the centre of a novel concerned with satirising White prejudice against Coloureds. Yvonne attends the same school as coloured girls '"But that's all right because I know that I'm white and they're coloured, and that I'm better than they are.'". Half-way through the novel, Yvonne realises that she is Coloured. It is crucial to Nicole's ironic intention that Yvonne should not be characterised either as White or as Coloured; for if racial attitudes are to be satirised through her, we have to see her continuity as a person across her changed classification. In Edgar Mittelholzer's The Life and Death of Sylvia (1953) set in the 1930's, the angst-ridden and introspective heroine plans to commit suicide as a way out of a depressed and depressing world. Her peculiar sensibility however, has to do with the spirit of her time, not with the fact that she is of mixed blood. And Ada, the shallow mulatress in Tom Redcam's One Brown Girl And - (1909) derives more obviously from George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel (in Adam Bede) than from an idea of mulatto sexual freedom and incapacity.

The freedom from any fashionable doctrine current in the external social context about what the personality is or ought to be, allows for a greater variety in the roles of the Coloured woman as a fictional character, and for fewer stereotyped attributes in the characterisation. But the three characters I have isolated share in a sensuous beauty which, in real life, is the basis of a continuing popular image of the Coloured woman as both sexually desirable and

highly sexed. The authors do not push their characters in the direction of the stereotype (indeed, Sylvia is almost frigid - a rare thing, but understandable in this case, for an approved Mittelholzer character); but elements deriving from the popular image appear as automatic attitudes to the heroines by other characters in the novels. Men look expectantly at Sylvia or pass their hands on her thighs and hope for her acquiescence. In Off White, Yvonne cannot understand Alan Grant's assumption that she will crawl into bed with him "like some common whore" until he reveals to her that she is Coloured.

But it is in John Hearne's The Faces of Love (1957) that the type images of the Coloured person - socially insecure and sexually overcharged - are turned to impressive fictional advantage. Rachel Ascom is the daughter of a German woman by a Negro. The combination "had given her that big, handsome body and the square-boned face that would not show age for a long time. She had been lucky too, with her skin. It was dark and taut, not sallow grey like some German and Negro mixtures, and it had a vivid texture like the surface of a thick, broad leaf" (p.35). Rachel's heavy attraction and sensuality are testified by a line of past lovers (impulsive one-night stands studding extended "big loves") and by her concurrent affairs, in the novel, with Michael Lovelace and Jojo Rygin. Switching from these characteristics of the Coloured woman, we can find Rachel illustrating the insecurity and excessive regard for material possession by which the male mulatto is typed. Fabricus the narrating character recounts: "The first night I had gone with her we had spent a long time talking afterwards, and she had said, 'I am nothing, you see. I came from nothing and none of you people will ever forget that when I make a mistake. Everything I become I've got to show. That's why I buy such good clothes. Every time I spend ten times what I should on clothes it's like a standard I've set myself'" (p.59).

But Hearne does not present Rachel as a type. We first see her the morning after a debauch when Andrew Fabricus, the narrating character and one of her

employees, calls to remind her of an appointment she appears to have forgotten. Fabricus, who is described in the novel as one of her past lovers, is free to enter Rachel's bedroom:

> Rachel Ascom was asleep when I went into the bedroom and switched on the green lamp on the telephone table. The stiff crinkles of her dull brown, short expensively dressed hair were still neat as they had been when she went straight to bed with hair-clips still in. The sheets were drawn up to her chin and I could see her face in a frame of white: the long, predatory curve of her flat yet arched nose; the massive cliffs of her cheek-bones, and the broad, plump, pouting firmness of her mouth. It was really a handsome face, and when awake it had a kind of fierce alertness that passed for dignity. But in the privacy and surrender of sleep there were always three worried lines grooved into the flat wide forehead, between the eyebrows. (The Faces of Love, p.10)

There is a man in the bed beside Rachel but the narrator's cool reportage of a familiar scene, and Rachel's utterly natural lack of embarrassment deprive us of a cheap or moralising response to the spectacle. The focus, initially, is on the physical heroine.

The white frame, and the past lover's close-up, magnifying nose, cheek-bones and mouth, bring Rachel's face sensuously before us (curve, arched, plump, pouting), and impresses her sheer physicality (long, broad, massive). But the combination of suggestive physical detail with a reading of the character growing out of it is a recurrent Hearne device for establishing and interpreting his personages. The almost unobtrusive "predatory" and the dominating features described by the narrator seem to account for the used-up man beside Rachel. Fabricus' intimate discrimination between "the kind of fierce alertness" on her face and the dignity it passed for; and his contrast, between her waking face as he remembers it and her sleeping face as he sees it now, shift our interest from the solidly visualised present to the waking future: for it is clearly implied by the narrator's reflections and by the "three worried lines grooved into the flat, wide forehead" that Rachel's imposing mask and fearless sexual presence plaster over an awareness of her own vulnerability. Our knowledge that Rachel is a

mulatto may speed up our recognition of the significance of the "short expensively dressed hair" or seem to intensify our awareness of Rachel's insecurity but as I have tried to demonstrate, the extract creates its complex effect without a reliance upon external knowledge.

Hearne's vivid characterisation and analysis interest us in Rachel as an individual from the first appearance. This interest is concretely held as we follow Rachel through her ruthless and shady business enterprises, and as we build up a picture of her sexual relationships as emotionally parasitic or materially motivated. That these different activities do not run in separate channels is shown in her capture of Michael Lovelace, the Englishman who comes out to edit the Newsletter in place of the now-retired Price, and instead of Rachel who might have been appointed:

> She had been in power so long at the Newsletter, and her work was very specialised and had to do with what she and old Price could get from the paper rather than what went into it. But she knew that Michael Lovelace was there because the old man whom she had seduced, pampered, tantalised, deceived and with whom she had schemed and built, could not trust her out of his sight. To control the stranger would be something like revenge, as well as being the sealing of a point that might become vulnerable. Besides, Rachel never liked to have anyone close to her who was independent of her. It made her really uncomfortable.
>
> (The Faces of Love, p.71)

Soon she begins to sleep with Lovelace, and he falls in love with her.

I am suggesting that Hearne's technique of characterisation and analysis arouses and holds our interest in Rachel as an individual, so that the mulatto traits to which we make a stock response are secondary to the artistic effects; going further, if we say that Rachel is the highly-sexed, immoral Coloured woman, and the socially insecure mulatto buttressing herself with material possessions it is necessary to recognise in the same breath that Hearne has fused and metamorphosed these two images in a broader study of the phychology of power working through an extraordinarily vivid character.

Rachel's exercise of power is at its most perverse in the love triangle which is formed upon the release from prison of the ebullient Jojo Rygin, her previous lover:

> She handled the situation between Michael and Jojo in her own way. And in her own way, I suppose, she handled it very well. Jojo was not in town often enough or long enough to be a problem. He was there just enough to give her what she liked him for, and what she had nearly forgotten while he was in prison. Michael, I think, must have been in love with her even at this time. Not like he became later on, but sufficiently to be foolish and vulnerable. You could see the strain of playing the other man begin to show itself in his quick, calmly observant eyes and in his smooth, confident, pleasantly superior face. I don't know how often or how deep he had been in love before, but I don't think he had ever done this sort of thing; and from what Oliver and I could see, he hated it. He hated it and he was caught in it. Looking back, I suppose this was Rachel's shrewdest use of her power. A more stupid woman would have pretended to be in love with Michael. That would have given him some rights in the case. She didn't. She only treated him, every day, with a fond, tender comradeship and admiration, in which her magnificent sexuality came packaged and deadly, as a kind of inevitable, honest and delicious flavouring to their relationship. (The Faces of Love, p.129)

This long extract leads into a discussion of the place of love in Hearne's fictional world (with special reference to The Faces of Love), and to a description of Rachel's process in the novel in relation to that value. Rachel's involvement in a process argues that she is not like Panty in God the Stonebreaker, a static character whose predictable traits are progressively illustrated, but a developing one. And as I hope to show, the development takes place beyond the limitations of any stereotype. For Rachel becomes one of us.

In Hearne's Land of the Living (1961) Stefan Mahler, the shattered refugee hero learns to put his life together again in the warmth of Bernice's generous and exemplary love. Later in the novel, it is only when Joan recognises that Mahler's need for her is as great as hers for him that love grows between them. Love is visualised in this novel as the very human expression of responsibility and need. Reflecting on Jojo Rygin's expectation that his coming wealth will help him to possess Rachel without rival, Fabricus the narrating character in

The Faces of Love expresses this basic Hearne value in personal terms: "Each of us was looking for a place to rest, and each of us had chosen her own way and the person he wanted to share that place with. There was nothing for me to say or do about Jojo or Rachel or Michael or anyone else for that matter. Only about Margaret. She was my responsibility and my love, and my worry. And she was all I needed or wanted" (p.241). In both these novels Hearne visualises this principle simultaneously with a view of the vulnerability of the human person in a broken world.[59] But "For weeks after she dropped them [her men] they would telephone Rachel at the office or prowl forlornly on the fringes of whatever group of people she was with at a party" (p.32). In her love affairs Rachel neither accepts responsibility for others nor confesses her own weakness. Uncompromisingly, she sees human relationships in terms of possessing or of being possessed: "'I told you once,' she said, 'nobody owns me. Jojo will take what I give him. And Michael. Nobody helped me to get where I am and nobody is going to own any part of me now.'" (p.126). In face of her own extreme vulnerability, Rachel uses love as a compensatory exercise of power. This makes her the arch-heretic in Hearne's fictional world.

Rachel's process in the novel culminates in martyrdom. But this represents a conversion to love. It is part of Hearne's rigorous and unsentimental approach to the character that Rachel's conversion is not inevitable, and that when it takes place it is more in the nature of a spontaneous and irrevocable gesture than of an access to earthly salvation. But her sacrifice of her own life to save Michael Lovelace, forces Fabricus to recognise the universality of Rachel's case:

> We had gone after love and attached our need to various people, and then tried to attach these people to ourselves. To use them instead of

---

[59]The epigraph to The Faces of Love as translated from Hadrian runs: "Little soul, wandering, gentle guest and comrade of my body, into what places will you now go. ..."

> giving whatever we had to them. Which of us hadn't? Not me, certainly. ... Not Sybil, ... Not Jojo ... Michael? Almost ... And Rachel? She had waited a long time to find the love she wanted. Maybe she had known a lot about it and had been contemptuous and terrified of what had been offered her in its place by Price, and me, and Jojo. It was hard to say. All I could see, as I went from my room, was her face, and the big, handsome body being flung between death and the man she had chosen. There was nothing more to make of it than that. (The Faces of Love, pp. 266-267)

By the time we come to the end of The Faces of Love, Rachel Ascom, mulatto, has been restored to her original status as Rachel Ascom, human person.

The account I have given of the condition of the Coloureds in nineteenth century Jamaica is confirmed by attitudes to them in modern West Indian fiction. By way of returning to my general theme, one aspect of their condition needs to be emphasised: for Coloureds, as for Whites, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, life in the West Indies was a life without fiction. This was part of a broader cultural deficiency in the islands which I have sought partially to explain in terms of White orientation towards England, and an absence of patriotism in the islands. Many Coloureds shared this orientation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But by the eighteen-nineties the different groups in the society (which I have described separately not just as a methodological convenience) were drawing closer together; and West Indian nationalism (or West Indian nationalisms) on an inclusive basis was beginning to develop.

James Anthony Froude had not seen this as a possibility in 1887: "The relations between the two populations are too embittered, and equality once established by law, the exclusive privilege of colour over colour cannot be restored. While slavery continued, the Whites ruled ... the blacks are now as free as they; there are two classes in the community; their interests are opposite as they are now understood, and one cannot be trusted with control over the other."[60] But Froude was only part right. After Emancipation, many ruined planters or other Whites who felt that the islands offered no further prospects of

---

[60] Froude p.286

wealth had started emigrating. As Black majority rule became more and more forseeable, others who could not bear the thought of "a black parliament and a black ministry" joined the exodus. Many, however, remained in the islands branching out into commerce and the civil service. Socially there was a trend to retreat into enclaves but for some Whites and near-Whites this was the period when the West Indies became home. In this connection, the Jamaican nationalism of the writer and journalist, Thomas MacDermot (1870-1933) is significant. MacDermot's career provides an early example of the connection between national feeling and West Indian literature. It is to a brief survey of that career that I would like now to turn.

Thomas Henry MacDermot (1870-1933): "Tom Redcam"

Tom Redcam was the son of an Anglican rector, the Rev. H. C. D. MacDermot, and of a former Miss Rutty. The Rutty's had recently arrived from the south of England but "the MacDermots were of Irish origin, had been settled in Jamaica since the eighteenth century, and reputedly were pure white."[61] Roberts' touch of scepticism is justified by the statement[62] of the Jamaican novelist Claude McKay (1880-1948) that his friend, Redcam, was an Octoreen. It is a nice distinction, for even in the eighteenth century Redcam would have qualified as a White man, with several gradations to spare. But Coloured or White, Redcam was emphatically turned towards the country in which he was born, and concerned with its social and political problems. In 1899, in an article entitled "The Present Condition of Jamaica and Jamaicans"[63] he had written:

> Today we lead; tomorrow we advise; and on the day following we are co-workers together with our black countrymen. ... It is as our actions and opinions relate to them that they [our actions and opinions] will stand applauded or condemned by the future historian.

---

[61] W. Adolphe Roberts Six Great Jamaicans, p.81

[62] In East Indian-West Indian, an account of two boyhoods in India and the West Indies. The unpublished type-script is in the possession of Mrs. Cedric Dover widow of the joint author.

[63] In The Canadian Magazine, October, 1899. Cited by Roberts p.88

And as editor of the Jamaica Times between 1904 and 1923, his comments on public affairs pointed, according to Roberts, to an ideal of "Jamaica within the Empire, but Jamaica as a recognised entity, and there was often an unhappy note in his writing when he thought that his native country was being treated as a step-child."

Redcam was not the first Creole nationalist in the West Indies, but he was the first Creole who practised as a literary man. A look at his works will show that his place in West Indian literature depends not upon his technical achievements as an artist but upon his absolute commitment to the idea of a national culture and a national literature, and his efforts to make these part of the climate of opinion in his time: In A Literature in the Making (Pioneer Press, Jamaica 1956) J. E. McFarlane writes:

> There may have been - indeed there were - writers in Jamaica before his time whose work possessed some merit as literature; but of the poetry that is undeniably Jamaican in its impulses, that draws its life and colour from Jamaica's sun and air, its stream, its blue skies, its wooded hills and flower-filled valleys, Tom Redcam is the founder.

The historical perspective is necessary.

Redcam's verse, which is the better known side of his literary career, contains several elements which are prominent in current West Indian literature. In "The Brown Mountain Village" he writes, as from exile, of his native land:

> Far torn from thy bosom, Jamaica, my mother
> Still, now and forever, my wounded heart grives;
> To the brown Mountain Village my dreams are returning
> Where the sun touches soft bananas' green leaves.
> .....
> Wherever I wander, whate'er I am gaining,
> Of thee, 'tis of thee, that my longing heart dreams;
> In fancy I hear your lone Ground Doves complaining
> Where the woodlands repeat the full pulse of they streams.[64]

The use of dialect is combined with social comment in "A Market Basket" in the Car", describing the clash between a peasant and a snobbish coloured:

> Why? doan't I pay me car-fare?
> Tuppence - same fe we two?
> What you da mek up you face for?
> You tink I is frighten fe you?

---

[64]Quotations are from Tom Redcam Orange Valley and Other Poems. The Pioneer Press, Kingston, Jamaica 1951. This posthumous collection also contains the author's San Gloria, the earliest known play by a West Indian.

In a more romantic mood, Redcam draws, as in "The Mothers of the City", upon simple peasant folk:

On their feet is the mud of the roadway,
Their frocks with the dust are soiled,
Big baskets wrinkle their foreheads
From afar have their footsteps toiled.

And in the verse play "San Gloria" describing the troubles of the aging and out of touch Discoverer, Redcam draws characteristically upon the Jamaican past - here the year spent on the north coast of Jamaica by Christopher Columbus and his castaways.

But even at its best Redcam's verse is not great poetry. His usually neglected prose fiction is not of a high quality either, but it has its interests. The two fairly substantial pieces in this category are Becka's Buckra Baby (1903), and One Brown Girl And - (1909), both published by the Jamaica Times Printery. There is a pathetic quality in Becka's Buckra Baby, and an ironic determination that runs from the surprise in the titling to the shock of Becka's death. The conversation between two Negro characters Mrs. Gyrton and Rosabella the mistress of a White man is followed by the appearance of Noel, a White West Indian, who gives a doll to little black Becka, Mrs. Gyrton's daughter. This doll is the "buckra baby" of the story. When Becka goes to the city with her doll, it is snatched by a city lout. Eventually he throws it on the road, and Becka is about to recover it in triumph when she is killed by a passing tram.

This grim note drops out when we come to One Brown Girl And - where Redcam has more room to deal with situations latent in the shorter work. The novel begins by setting up the brown girl Liberta Passley "the most unhappy woman in Kingston ... and in Jamaica" as a strong centre of interest. She "seldom failed to leave on her intimates the impressions that her conformity and style were outward only and that there was an inner and hidden Liberta Passley, a soul of storm, a flash reserved for emergency, keen as the lightning and swift as death.

The Revolutionary was in that soul". With an obvious but fortunately not long-drawn-out irony, Redcam as omniscient novelist relates Liberta's dilemma to her English education, for "one warm summer Liberta was handed over to Mother England to grow and to be trained among her sturdy sons and strong-limbed, health-glowing daughters." The kind of character Redcam begins with in this novel has interested other West Indian novelists.[65] But whereas George Lamming's Fola and Claude McKay's Bita Plant are explored with skill and concentration, Redcam turns away from his opportunity.

For the author's moral concern already explicit in omniscient commentary shifts the interest to the sexual history of Ada a pretty but light-headed mulatto employed by Liberta. Ada, Redcam's version of Hetty Sorrell, is in love with Harold, a superior and casual young man who now wishes to escape an involvement he had himself provoked. The moral problems which arise from this situation are to be arbitrated by two characters who are conceived almost exclusively to serve such functions in the novel. Noel, good and gentle in her daily life, is Redcam's charitable West Indian White heroine brought over from Becka's Buckra Baby: her amateur religiousness is buttressed in the novel by the professional zeal of an attrative Salvation Army Major. Noel coldly upbraids Harold, and overwhelms Ada with generosity. When Ada runs away in shame and desperation it is the Major and Noel who rescue her dramatically from the hands of a lustful businessman.

In all this excitement, Liberta is reduced to peripheral status. Ada who might have become an interesting focus for the novel is too predictably manipulated in the moral design. Equally unfortunately, Noel's moral function defines her so absolutely that Redcam cannot give her credibility, far less allow a human response - either flat rejection or ambiguous delay - when Harold makes his declaration to her.

---

[65] Notably Claude McKay in Banana Bottom (1933) and George Lamming in Season of Adventure (1960)

In Chapters 3 and 4 of the novel, Redcam turns from the heated middle-class sitting room to present breezier sketches from peasant life. It is clear at this point that the structural principle in the work is to include episodes from different levels of Jamaican life and hope that they will cohere. But in effect, the peasant episodes are quite disconnected from what precedes them in the novel, and from subsequent happenings. Since, however, a characterising feature of the modern West Indian novel is the way in which an external view of the Negro as pathetic, or comic or terrifying is replaced by an inside view of a more completely articulated person, it is of seminal interest to see how Redcam, a White West Indian in the early years of this century, approaches his Negro characters.

Redcam does not, as I have already implied, choose his central characters from among the Negroes, and to some extent Noel's function as moral arbiter and charitable lady indicates an authorial view of Negroes as pathetic. At first glance the description of Mrs. Gyrton's economic situation seems to be in characteristic West Indian social protest tradition. But the artistic difference between this kind of protest in West Indian writing and its occurrence in British anti-slavery writing, for example, is the way in which the West Indian school are able to make their protest without limiting their characters to being pathetic vehicles. Redcam's knowledge of the <u>situation</u> he is writing about gives an air of realism to his account, but his view at this point, of the Negro person as pathetic, prevents him from visualising Mrs. Gyrton as an individual latent with possibility. The distinction I am trying to make becomes obvious when we consider that in <u>The Hills Were Joyful Together</u> (1953) Roger Mais (1905-1955) another writer from Jamaica, whose declared intention was "to give the world a true picture of the real Jamaica and the dreadful conditions of the working classes", negates in his novel the simple determinism which such an approach might imply: tension is created in the work by our sense of the latent freedom and the energy of Mais'

imprisoned characters. And Mais, perhaps tactlessly, but in explication of his vision accompanies his demonstrations by a choric gloss asserting the universality of his case "This is the story of man's life upon earth that formed him ... all his being is encompassed about from birth with dying ..."; the choric gloss also confirms the created sense of his characters' possibilities: "enclosed within these walls a man was shut from light, like a seed struggling toward the sunlight from between damp stones ...". Redcam's fictional character, in her realistic surroundings, does not seem to have the lifelessness of the characters in anti-slavery novels, but she lacks the life of the Mais character.

Redcam's handling of the characters and situation when Grant makes a proposal for a mutually convenient domestic arrangement slides into the comic stereotype. In order to decide whether she should begin what would be a sinful relationship with Grant, Mrs. Gyrton, strongly advised by the comically nomenclatured Ebenezer Raphael White, assembles her friends in council. They have all, in fact, come for the meal. When Mrs. Gyrton affectedly formulates her dilemma in terms of comfort or respectability and does so in dialect, it becomes clear that Redcam's intention has now switched to social comedy. In itself, the episode is highly amusing. But it reflects oddly on the seriousness of Redcam's earlier protest; and in presenting his comic characters through dialect, Redcam continues an automatic association against which modern West Indian writing has had to struggle both in the presentation of the Negro, and in the writers' experiments for a less restricted use of dialect.[66]

A more romantic view of the Negro, a curious reminder of an older tradition, and a procursor of later attitudes, emerges in Redcam's handling, at another social level, of Fidelia Stanton, a Negro girl employed as a seamstress in a

---

[66]For a discussion of this point see Chapter IV, passim.

Portuguese household. Redcam begins with a definite physical impression of Fidelia: "She was tall and erect, with a well-shaped and well proportioned body that in motion suggested strength rather than gracefulness: strength and resolution" (p.44). But the author moves from the immediacy of the character to a celebration or revaluation of her racial past in the West Indies:

> The unadulterated blood of her tribe ran in her veins and she was a Coromanke, daughter that is of the bravest of all the tribes that were brought to our shores during the eighteenth century, from the West Coast of Africa. They come as slaves; but the Coromantees, brave enduring, haughty and resolute, made bad bondsmen. Men whom nature had made free in soul, their fellow men found it no easy task to fetter. Through their brief periods of quiet submission they worked wonderfully well, inspired by their pride of race to show their powers; but they sprang into rebellion as surely as the rays of the midday sun, passed through the burning glass, kindle fire: and those rebellions which the Coromantees led ... (One Brown Girl And -, p.44)

A description of the Roman deaths of Tacky and his defeated men after the Great Easter rebellion of 1760 is followed by a glorious view of the abolition of the slave trade in respect of Coromantees:

> The white man came to see ultimately that it did not pay to have these fierce free men as slaves and in Jamaica their further importation was prohibited by law. (One Brown Girl And -, p.44)

The revaluation of the Jamaican past opens out into a further 'corrective' view of the African past:

> It is the conventional idea that the black men brought to the West Indies salves came from a life wholly savage and barbarous; through which there ran not a single vein of coherent organisation; a life unredeemed by a single spark of nobility and unsustained by aught of organised government, law or order. The truth however is that in some cases these men and women came from tribes which maintained a system and code of unwirtten law that embodied for the tribe at least more thoroughly and efficiently than Christianity has yet succeeded in doing for the whole race in the West Indies a great number of those moral obligations that are elemental and are vital to the wellbeing of a people. (One Brown Girl And -, p.45)

These essays into the African past (immediate and remote) are intrusions, from an artistic point of view; and they show more liberalism than accuracy as historical information. But I have given them prominence because there seems to

be represented in Redcam the meeting point of European romantic attitudes (anti-slavery) to the African, and the sentiments of the Negritude writers from the West Indies I shall describe in Chapter III. Writing in 1909 long after the anti-slavery tradition had died, and well before Negritude became a force in West Indian and African literatures, Redcam was both extraordinarily liberal and extraordinarily nationalistic.

But these qualities are not necessarily artistic ones. Returning at last to his fictional character, Redcam describes John Meffala's assault upon Fidelia's honour and her thumping reply. The entrance of Mrs. Meffala provides an occasion for the exercise of Redcam's considerable satiric power against White prejudice, and for the voice of liberal protest to be heard through Fidelia's passionate "I am flesh and blood too". Redcam's difficulty with the black character, however, is not satisfactorily resolved. Defending the smug Fidelia against one stereotype ("I am a black girl and he thought that all black girls are alike") the author pushes her towards another. Her father was a King. Her people are a mighty but fallen people.

> Fidelia Stanton was a full-blooded Coromantee though she knew nothing of the history of her tribe. None had ever told her of the valiant deeds of her grandfathers and of their sires; but the pure tribal blood flowing in her veins was a conducting chain along which thrilled mighty but irresistible forces that connected her in moments of emergency with that race and that past in Africa to which she belonged. In that past lay buried sudden and bloody raids on enemies, hate of whom was as old as the Coromantee name and as the tribal faith: desperate fighting in the blackness of night ... (<u>One Brown Girl And -</u>, p.44)

It is consoling to think that Fidelia's violent refusal of John Meffala was not entirely due to the solid middle-class prudery Redcam arms her with; on the other hand it is disappointing to begin to feel that the whole thing was just a rush of the warrior blood.

In suggesting that <u>One Brown Girl And -</u> is more interesting than Redcam's verse I do not wish to imply that it is a successful work of art. But its lively

dialect and its comic episodes give it a certain light distinction. More seriously, it is full of beginnings and transitions of interest to the historian of the West Indian novel. It is an early failure but an illuminating one which ought to be reprinted.

I began this account by suggesting that the literary quality of Redcam's work is not very high and that he is remembered more as an influence. And in looking at <u>One Brown Girl And -</u>, I pointed to several features that pre-figure elements in more recent West Indian writing. But this is not to say that there is any direct connection between the older writer and his successors after the Second World War: among the present generation of West Indian writers, Redcam's verse is neglected and his prose fiction is unknown.

When we turn to the work of what J. E. Clare McFarlane, already quoted, calls "the little group of singers ... that ... organised themselves [in 1923] into a League whose chief aim was to be the study of poetry and encouragement of practising writers" there is little evidence that Redcam's broader vision had communicated itself to his declared followers. His interest in Jamaican history and his celebration of the sights and sounds of the native land had not been separate from a concern with contemporary social problems. Although his manner often derived from Tennyson and Swinburne, he sometimes used dialect in his poems. The Poetry League poets were dilettante scribblers musing on Beauty, Life and Thought in tropical surroundings.

Yet, by 1933, the League had "sufficiently established its authority in literary matters" to make Tom Redcam first Poet Laureate of Jamaica. The solemn address to his ghost on this ceremonial occasion referred to Redcam's devotion to literature during years when he "stood almost alone in its cause", and saw his activities as being "chiefly instrumental in keeping alive amongst us the urge towards creative art, thereby making possible the production of a body of poetry which is winning recognition in the literary world at large and taking,

wherever the English language is spoken and men delight in song, the story of the charm and beauty of the land"[67] he loved so well. Redcam cannot be held responsible for the inanities of the small middle-class group to which he addressed himself. Redcam's historic role lies in this: that in the early years of the twentieth century out of a cultural void in the islands, he wrote poetry and prose himself and encouraged others to do so. It is even more remarkable that he wished to inspire a distinctively Jamaican literature but it must be emphasised that he did not "keep alive" the urge towards art: in his pioneering time, Redcam laboured to create it.

Roberts' enthusiastic view in Six Great Jamaicans that Redcam "undoubtedly ... helped this writer to make the best use of his gifts, and so prepared the way for McKay's career in the United States"(p.91), reappears in Peter Abrahams' introduction to the Independence Anthology of Jamaican Literature.[68] It is true that Redcam published some of McKay's poems in the Jamaica Times, but this was only part of a general programme of encouragement for all writers. McKay was, in fact, discovered at his mulatto Trades Master's shop some time in 1908 or late 1907 by an Englishman Walter Jekyll. So thoroughly did Jekyll take McKay in hand[69] that the poet had two volumes[70] published in 1912. To try to pinpoint a concrete Redcam influence of this kind is to forget the aridity of the cultural situation in which Redcam operated, and consequently, to underestimate his value as a propagandist for the idea of writing by Jamaicans.

---

[67]See J. E. Clare McFarlane's Introduction to Orange Valley and Other Poems, pp. XVI-XVII

[68]Published by The Arts Celebration Committee of The Ministry of Development and Welfare, Jamaica 1962.

[69]See McKay's autobiography A Long Way from Home N.Y. 1937

[70]They were: Songs of Jamaica, Aston W. Gardner and Co., Kingston (1912) and Constab Ballads (1912).

But there is a useful connection to be made between Redcam and McKay. In an unpublished manuscript,[71] McKay describes how Redcam and Mrs. Redcam regretted the Negro's decision to go to America: "Tom Redcam said to me, 'Claude, we hate to see you go, because you will be changed, terribly changed by America.' His wife agreed with him. She was a great lover of Wordsworth and Keats and thought that if I remained in Jamaica I might become a great Negro poet." By 1912, Redcam's major project to create a literary community in the island had failed; in 1912, wishing to make a literary reputation, McKay had recognised the need to emigrate. In the 1950's much the same situation faced the new generation of West Indian writers. I shall deal with the post-war literary emigration to the United Kingdom in the next section, but I want to conclude the account of Redcam's career by describing the attempt he led to create a West Indian market for a West Indian literature.

In 1903, there appeared the first piece of extended prose fiction that I have listed as a West Indian novel. The publisher's foreword to Becke's Buckra Baby[72] runs:

> In "The All Jamaica Library" we are presenting, to a Jamaican public at a price so small as to make each publication generally purchasable, a literary embodiment of Jamaican subjects. Poetry, Fiction, History and Essays, will be included, all dealing directly with Jamaica and Jamaicans, and written by Jamaicans, many of whom are well-known to the public as successful writers. We hope to give readers something worth buying, and we hope all Jamaicans will support this attempt to develope /sic/ neglected resources of mental and aesthetic wealth.

The publisher was Redcam. In 1905, Maroon Medicine by "T. Snod" /E. A. Dodd/ appeared as No. II of The All Jamaica Library. The price was sixpence. Marguerite by W. A. Campbell was published as No. III in 1907 and in 1909 Redcam's One Brown Girl And - appeared as Nos. IV-V.

---

[71] East Indian-West Indian a joint early autobiography with the Eurasian Cedric Dover. A typescript in possession of Dover's widow, Mrs. Maureen Dover.

[72] All the volumes in The All Jamaica Library were printed by Times Printery, Kingston, Jamaica.

Roberts states flatly in Six Great Jamaicans that The All Jamaica Library was "a project which had little success". It is not difficult to understand why. The author of Marguerite: "A Story of the Earthquake" confesses in the preface that "if I am indebted to any previous work for the central idea of my story, such obligation should be ascribed to the Wilhelm-Mariana studies in Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, which I read some two years ago, and with which everyone is familiar." There is more promising material in the rural sketches of Maroon Medicine, the last two of the four stories "The Red Cock" and "The Courting of the Dudes" containing some hilarious moments. But both these authors were obviously gentlemen amateurs "having a go" to help out their friend Redcam. It is difficult to resist concluding that the author of One Brown Girl And - was the nearest thing in Jamaica to a serious writer of fiction before 1910.

But it was not only the lack of suitable writers that worked against The All Jamaica Library. In the preface to One Brown Girl And - Redcam volunteers the valuable information that almost two thousand copies of Becka's Buckra Baby had been sold. In the same preface, however, there are signs of financial anxiety:

> I desire to get from this novel a reasonable return in money ... If the public of Jamaica co-operate by the purchase of this volume, there are other stories to follow along the same channel of publication. ... Now I would make it very clear that I ask no one, on the sentimental grounds of patronising a local writer or supporting local literature to pay a shilling for what he or she does not want but this I ask as the minimum of fair-play to this or to any local independent publication, whether by myself or by another, that those who want to read the book and those who read it and like it, buy it. ... All the fine talk in the world, and all the nice expressions of enthusiasm and regard will avail little if the enthusiasts do not buy the local publication that they declare so well deserves support.

In the early 1900's the degree of literacy and the social condition of the black masses were such that Redcam had to depend upon a coloured and White-skinned buying public who could not reasonably have been expected to absorb more than

two thousand copies of a work: the sales of Becka's Buckra Baby amounted to around this figure over a period of three years from 1903 to 1905.

Had Redcam and the Times Printery not been able to keep the cost down, it is unlikely that even such a sale would have been achieved. It was a losing battle, however, not only in the sense that the writer could not hope for an income from his fiction but also from the point of view of prestige. Redcam was aware of this, as he declared in the preface: "In the face of much kind advice to the contrary, appreciated though not followed, the writer has deliberately chosen to publish this story here, and to seek a Jamaican audience rather than an audience abroad. The M.S. has not, so far, been submitted to any publisher outside Jamaica." When four years later H. G. deLisser's Jane: a story of Jamaica (1913) was published by the Gleaner Co., (after having been serialised in the daily newspaper the Jamaica Cleaner) it must have seemed that Redcam's ideal was catching. A British edition of this novel in 1914 had the appearance of the cultural export of a product tested and approved first in the country of origin. But this was never to become the pattern in the literary relationship between the West Indies and Britain. Within three years de Lisser was to write in an author's note to his locally published Triumphant Squalitone (1917): "There are many reasons for issuing local editions of my books. The best, from the Jamaica reader's point of view is that he obtains the work much more cheaply than he otherwise could. The Colonial Editions of my previous stories, for instance, sell at half-a-crown per copy. And that is a price which as experience has proved, very few Jamaicans can easily pay." With the air of a man who has made good elsewhere, de Lisser went on to declare that the publishers expected no financial profit. The book was being sold at "fully 50 per cent. below its cost of production" because of the advertisements it carried. "The reading public of this country, therefore, who have bought my books owe it entirely to the merchants and business houses of Kingston that they have been able to do so at a low price."

The publication by Methuen and Co. Ltd., of de Lisser's Jane's Career (1914) and Susan Proudleigh (1915) marked the beginning of the West Indian writer's economic and psychological dependence upon British publishers and readers. It also signalled the end of Redcam's ideal. It is not difficult to recognise today that Redcam's efforts had been premature. But it is impossible to withhold admiration from this patriot who was, in some ways, too far ahead of his times. Creative enterprise like his might have brought about a closer relationship between the post-1950 burst of writing by West Indians and the increasing number of possible readers in the islands. As it is, the life without fiction Redcam sought to transform, persists as one of the deepest ironies in the West Indian social situation. It is to this condition, some of its causes, and its accumulated consequences that I would now like to turn.

(iii) The Drift Towards an Audience

Since 1950, and up to August 1966 no fewer than 111 works of prose fiction by writers from six different territories in the West Indies have been published. But life in the West Indies is still a life without fiction. Ninety-nine of the works published in the period defined above were first issued in London by London publishing houses. The following table gives complete figures for the period 1950-1964. It is broken into five year units to show the increase in West Indian writing and the continued dependence upon British publishers.

Five-Year Period	Number first Published	Places of Publication			
		United Kingdom	Jamaica	U.S.A.	Australia
1950-1954	20	14	5	0	1
1955-1959	32	28	2	1	1
1960-1964	45	43	1	1	0

Not only are most West Indian novels printed and first published in Britain. Nearly every West Indian novelist since 1950 has settled, at least for a while, in this country. Michael Anthony (Trinidad, b. 1932), Wilson Harris (Guyana, b. 1921), George Lamming (Barbados, b. 1927), V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad, b. 1932), Andrew Salkey (Jamaica, b. 1928) and Samuel Selvon (Trinidad, b. 1933) still live in the English metropolis. Roger Mais (Jamaica, 1905-1955) spent much of the period 1951-1954 (when his novels were being published) in London; both Jan Carew (Guyana b. 1925) and John Hearne (Jamaica, b. 1926) established themselves as writers while living in that city.

London is indisputably the West Indian literary capital.

(iii)(a) Local Literature

In the first sub-division of this section I want to make a resume of the literary situation prior to 1950, seeing compositions by writers resident[73] in the islands in the context of ultimately unsuccessful efforts to establish literary and artistic life in the West Indies. The first generalisation to be made about writing in this period is that people in one island did not know what people in another were doing. The second generalisation is that the literary merit of the works involved is not great. The approach will therefore be island by island, and

[73]Three emigre writers of the period - Claude McKay (1890-1948) Eric Walrond (1898-1966) and W. Adolphe Roberts (1886-1962) are included in 'Precursors' the prologue to Chapter VI.

unless a work seems to be of special interest I shall provide little more than bibliographic information.

As has been argued above The All Jamaica Library[74] was an explicit attempt to create a Jamaican literature. Its failure is accounted for by the limited reading public being addressed as well as by the imcompetence of the writers. Redcam's Becka's Buckra Baby (1903) had been No. 1 in the Library. No. 2 was Maroon Medicine (1905) by 'E. Snod' whose real name was E. A. Dodd.[75] The work was sold at six-pence per copy. It contains four stories - 'Maroon Medicine', 'Paccy Rum', 'The Red Cock' and 'The courting of the Dudes'. In an authorial preface, Dodd abjures social problems and "all such deep questions" to present comic sketches from peasant life. He does this admirably through his trickster hero Mr. Watson (an anancy type character who lives by his wits) and through a lively use of dialect. But Maroon Medicine has no other claims upon the reader. No. 3 in Redcam's Library was Marguerite: A Story of the Earthquake (1907) by W. A. Campbell.[76] Marguerite is a story of frustrated love and a meeting many years later when the disappointed true lover, now a priest meets his former love, her husband and their child on a train. The child establishes an intuitive rapport with the priest and the former lovers recognise each other but suffer in delicious reticence. The main characters in the story are White Creoles, and in the Preface, Campbell learnedly confesses a debt "to the Wilhelm-Mariana studies in Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship which I read some two years ago, and with which every one is familiar." Marguerite's sub-literary romanticism makes for boring reading. Nos 4-5 in The All Jamaica

---

[74] A certain amount of repetition is inevitable in this paragraph.

[75] Neither the Library of the University of the West Indies nor the West India Reference Library, The Institute of Jamaica has been able to provide information about Dodd. But it is highly probable from his facility with the dialect and from his inclusion in the All Jamaica Library that he was a Jamaican.

[76] William Alexander Campbell b. Kingston, March 12, 1835. Post-master general of Jamaica 1939-1945.

Library appeared in 1909. Redcam's *One Brown Girl And -* has been discussed at length above.

The All Jamaica Library had been printed and published in association with the Jamaica Times, a weekly edited by Tom Redcam. In 1913, H. G. de Lisser serialised his own *Jane: A Story of Jamaica* in the Jamaica *Gleaner* which he was editing. The next year saw the publication of this work in England by Methuen and Co. Ltd. as *Jane's Career: A Story of Jamaica*. Thus began a publishing career that lasted until 1958 when *The Arawak Girl* became de Lisser's fourth work to be published posthumously. De Lisser's second novel *Susan Proudleigh* (1915) was first issued by Methuen. Methuen had manufactured 1,000 copies of the first work; for the second the number was increased to 3,000. Thereafter, de Lisser seems to have regarded England as his preferred place of publication so that while the shorter works *Triumphant Squalitone* (1917) and *Revenge* (1919) were printed and published in Jamaica,[77] *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929) and *Under the Sun* (1937) were done by the British publishers E. Benn Ltd. Benn published the next two works *Psyche* (1952) and *Morgan's Daughter* (1953) for de Lisser's widow. Finally, *The Arawak Girl* which was too short, and not suitable for the British market, was done by The Pioneer Press, Jamaica in 1958.

The first point to be made is that de Lisser was not a propagandist for a Jamaican literature as Redcam had been. Another fact to be registered is that the younger man did not have to earn his living by writing fiction. H. G. de Lisser (1878-1944) was of Portuguese origin. The early death of his father obliged the son to leave school and become a clerk "in a drug store opposite the old Sollas Market and in an ironmonger's on King Street".[78] But doors which would have been shut to an equally talented Negro were open to the white-skinned de Lisser. It was

---

[77] By the Gleaner Co. Ltd., Kingston, Jamaica.

[78] W. Adolphe Roberts in *Six Great Jamaicans* (Kingston, Pioneer Press 1951) p. 101. I draw upon pages 99-117 for my facts about de Lisser. Further quotation will be followed by page references without footnotes.

not long before he was made a library assistant at the Institute of Jamaica where he "taught himself French and Spanish, and read deeply in political economy, biology, philosophy and general philosophy" (p.101). Roberts describes the rapidity with which the talented young man rose till he became editor of the Gleaner in 1904. Twenty-two years membership on the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica (seventeen as Chairman) began in 1910, and in 1917, when the Jamaica Imperial Association was founded "by a group of planters, merchants and professional men", de Lisser "was appointed general secretary and filled this post until the end of his life" (p.107). As a writer, de Lisser was financially independent, and as a citizen he dominated the public life of Jamaica for almost thirty years. Claude McKay emigrated to the United States in 1912: the Negro's future as writer and as citizen would have been severely limited in the colony of his birth.

There are certain recurrent features throughout De Lisser's novels: a penchant for the type of the strong-minded herione; a nice satirical eye for social distinctions; and an expository attitude towards social and historical facts. Each of the novels, indeed, is based upon a historical event or set in a specific period: Jane's Career (1914) deals with Kingston of the early decades of the twentieth century while The Arawak Girl (1958) is set in Jamaica of the 1490's, the time of Christopher Columbus' shipwreck on the northern coast. Between these two times the other novels are systematically located. There is a pattern. Jane's Career is the first West Indian novel in which the central character is black, and the scene is contemporary. In Susan Proudleigh (1915), topically set in Panama, the central character is still Negro, but brown-skinned. From this point, the novels either draw less and less upon the contemporary scene (Revenge: A Tale of Old Jamaica, 1919) or the central characters cease to be black (Triumphant Squalitone, 1917 and Under the Sun, 1937). With the publication of The White Witch of Rosehall (1929) De Lisser followed the historical vein opened up with Revenge and retreated

to the fifteenth century setting of The Arawak Girl. In this retreat from the contemporary, the authorial viewpoint becomes more and more that of a European or of an alien.

This pattern in the fiction is paralleled by De Lisser's political career. The dedication of Jane's Career to Sir Sidney Olivier is one sign of De Lisser's Fabian Socialist leaning, and this is confirmed by the author's exposés in the novel of the sufferings of the lower classes. In a non-fiction publication moreover, De Lisser showed himself in 1913 to be a critic of colonial rule:

> Politically, the people of Jamaica are contented enough, but it would be a mistake to imagine that they are inclined to accept as unchangeable the present system of Government... Since 1884 the Government has been steadily encroaching upon the powers of the elected members, while the people of the colony are becoming less and less disposed to be ruled entirely by officials.[79]

By 1917 his fortunes and his opinions had changed. In an editorial in the Gleaner, June 20, 1938[80] H. G. de Lisser, conservative spokesman wrote:

> From complete self-Government for Jamaica Good Lord, deliver us. Not even Full Representative Government can be considered at a time when, to use a colloquialism, the tail is wagging the dog, and tub-thumping is practically the order of the day.... An advanced political Constitution, particularly Self-Government, is entirely out of the question when but a few weeks ago[81] the capital of Jamaica was threatened by mob rule.

Not even the Colonial Office would hold this view. To his death in May 1944 de Lisser remained a vigorous opponent of self-government. Had he lived a few months longer he would have had to witness the proclamation in 1945 of the new Constitution and universal adult suffrage for Jamaica.

De Lisser's anti-nationalistic position has affected West Indian intellectuals' attitudes to his place in West Indian writing. The novels themselves do not encourage a favourable estimate[82] but I would like here to make a claim for

---

[79] H. G. de Lisser in Twentieth Century Jamaica (1913). Cited by Roberts p.109.

[80] Cited by Roberts, p.111.

[81] An allusion to the Kingston riots of May, 1938 - a Jamaican manifestation of the social unrest that run throughout the West Indies in 1930's.

[82] There are discussions of The Arawak Girl and The White Witch of Rosehall in Chapter III.

Jane's Career. It is the first West Indian novel in which the central character is black; Jane is the first full West Indian fictional herione; and it is in Jane's Career that de Lisser's attitude to his raw material and to his characters comes closest to being analagous to that of later West Indian writers.

One element in Jane's Career is the process of growing up, experienced by a young country girl who comes to Kingston as a "schoolgirl" - an apprentice domestic servant. Another element is de Lisser's wish to protest against the exploitation of domestics and to give a picture of Kingston lower class life. The success of the novel lies in containing the protest intention within the character's process.

The novel divides into five parts of uneven length. In the first, Jane is the simple village girl in her father's house. In the second, she is a schoolgirl employed at a shilling per week in the home of a lower middle-class mulatto Mrs. Mason. In the third part, Jane runs away from Mrs. Mason's house and shares a room in a slum district with a virago called Sathyra. The fourth part finds Jane living by herself after a quarrel with Sathyra. Finally, Jane wins the protective affection of a young man Vincent Broglie who takes her to live in a respectable district called Campbell Town where they have a child and then a white wedding. To put it this way is to clear the ground for sighting the work's main weakness.

In the first part set in the country, de Lisser cannot help creating comic rural characters. Although the authorial voice tells of the new class of Jamaican peasants who are looking for "some placewhere life would be different from what it was in the village" (p.15) the comic presentations of Daddy Buckram the pompous village Elder, and Celestina the country girl back with city sophistication work against the author's wish to portray a decaying village. When Celestina advises Jane that it is necessary to find a male friend in the big city, Jane's reply seems to be invented for comic purposes: "But here Jane shook her head resolutely. 'No', she said, 'I promise me fader to keep meself up, and I gwine to do it. Perhaps

I may married one of dese days; who is to tell.'" The trouble with this speech is that it is an accurate forecast of what Jane does at the end:

> In her white muslin dress, with her hair done up with ribbons, wearing high-heeled shoes and looking as though she had been born to entertaining guests, Jane is not very like the little girl we saw sitting mute and frightened as she drove into Kingston with Mrs. Mason. She is not much like the girl we saw sharing apartments with Sathyra. She looks very much tonight as if she has kept herself up; her baby is now fully developed; she has the lover she cares for, and in the other room lies "the kid" whom all the women declare to be the "dead image" of his father, while all the men see the mother chiefly in his lineaments. It is Jane perfectly contented at last, and dreaming of no higher fortune. It is Jane who now herself employs a schoolgirl who submissively calls her Miss Jane, and obeys her slightest command. (Jane's Career, p.295)

We are left with the uncomfortable feeling that the author is patronising the heroine and being ironic at the same time. The celebration of Jane's white wedding in the final chapter consolidates this impression. The withdrawal of the author's sympathy which this seems to indicate does not accord with the attitude in the longer central sections of the novel.

As Jane leaves her village on the way to Constant Spring the intermediate stage in her journey, for instance, de Lisser's "objective" narration invests the landscape with symbolic anticipations of Jane's ups and downs, moments of despair and moments of happiness in the big and tangled city:

> On either hand the forest ran, the ground often rising steeply into lofty eminences. Part of the road was in shadow, the sun not yet having climbed high enough to flood every inch of the countryside with its living light. But already the freshness of the morning was wearing away, and as she walked she was the big green lizards chasing their prey across the ground, and amongst the trees she heard the birds piping and calling to one another. Frequently, for a little while, the entire way would be plunged in semi-darkness; this was when the great trees, bending over on either side, intermingled their branches, thus forming a leafy roof which caught and intercepted the rays of the rapidly rising sun.
>
> Sometimes the forest would end upon the right hand or the left, the roadside would break away into sheer precipice, and a great stretch of green and fertile country, flooded with warm and golden light would spread out into the distance for miles and miles, until it merged itself into yet more distant hills and radiant sky.
>
> ...
>
> Such scenes were familiar to Jane, and roused her admiration not at all. She hardly glanced to right or left as she trudged on; never once did she reflect that she was leaving all this, which had formed part of her life as far back as she could remember, and leaving it perhaps for ever.
>
> (Jane's Career, pp. 34-35)

The spontaneous symbolism looks forward. The concluding authorial comment looks clumsily back and seems to lament Jane's unreflecting nature. Nevertheless one cannot help feeling that Jane, glancing neither to right or left, trudging on, involuntarily becomes a poignant figure in a landscape to which she is bound by a Wordsworthian "feeling of blind love".

The description of Jane's response to the city immediately upon arrival is equally fortunate. De Lisser's use of the omniscient novelist convention in the later novels becomes stiff. He is seldom able to move in and out of a character's consciousness as in Jane's Career:.

> ... She had never seen such large houses before; in a vague sort of way she wondered how many hundreds of people lived in them, so spacious did the villas of the Kingston gentry appear to her unsophisticated eyes. Then there was the wonder of the electric-cars, things she had often heard of, but which she had never been able to imagine in any kind of way. When she came to where the road ended and the long street proper began, her amazement further increased. The numerous little shops, the houses standing close to one another, the bustle of the street, the number of people she saw moving in all directions, or lazily leaning against doors and fences, or squatting on the edges of sidewalks and wherever else they could find a seat - she had never thought that so many buildings and persons could be seen at one time; and the farther she went the more did she become impressed with the greatness of the city in which she had come to live. (Jane's Career, p.43)

What is truly impressive in this passage is the way in which de Lisser suggests Jane's excitement without losing a balanced view. Jane may be swept away by the new city and the authorial voice may imitate her wonder, but the passage closes on an ironic note whose unobtrusiveness (my italics) prevents it from being a comment on the character. Instead it is a compassionate footnote to all our human experience.

In the Mason household de Lisser expresses Jane's growth in terms of mastery of her duties increased familiarity with the city and disillusion with Mrs. Mason. The author's contempt for the up and coming mulatto class is never out of view but it is contained by Jane's legitimate response to her mistress:

...Jane still admitted that Mrs. Mason was a lady but Jane felt that Mrs. Mason was only a lady of sorts. She lived in a street where all the houses were small and shabby, and if she did not have the merit of possessing a brown complexion, if at least one-half of her physical composition was white, there were thousands of others life her in Kingston and thousands who were lighter in colour than she could claim to be... Who after all, was Mrs. Mason? Jane answered the question in her own way.
(Jane's Career, pp. 105-106)

If one suspects at times that de Lisser is using Jane in a vendetta against the class represented by Mrs. Mason, the author's identification with the character when Jane runs away is less open to doubt.

In British fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth century the Negro was either a comic peripheral character or a central pathetic or Noble one. The range of these characters' experience was severely limited by the stereotyped authorial intentions. In the three middle sections of Jane's Career de Lisser goes a long way towards breaking the stereotype traditions associated with the Negro in fiction.

Few of de Lisser's Negro characters are allowed to have the human capacity of Jane. Her seduction by Mrs. Mason's nephew, Cecil, is done in terms of the confused excitement of adolescence; her recovery, and the rejection of Cecil are presented as a triumph of character. When her mother pays a visit and Mrs. Mason manages to make a good impression, de Lisser allows his heroine the complex emotion of jealousy: "She was not so glad to see her mother now. She felt that one who should have been her friend had gone over completely to the enemy" (p.111). Going out in a cab with Vincent Broglie, Jane is made to run from joy to shock:

Jane felt that this was one of the treats of her life; she was proud to be driving in a cab, proud to be driving with such a person, proud that he didn't think himself too good to be seen in public with her; and her laughing face showed her pleasure. They were not far from home when, turning a corner and still chatting gaily, they had to pull up quickly to allow an electric-car to pass. Both Jane and Vincent stared at the people in the car. Amongst the passengers and looking full at her and her companion, was Mr. Curden, Jane's admirer and chief.
(Jane's Career, pp. 237-238)

When Jane breaks from Mrs. Mason, quarrels with Sathyra and goes to live in a slum yard by herself, de Lisser uses the character as a means of exposing current evils.

but at their best the mood of the character and the authorial comment intensify each other. Needless to say, the protest itself becomes more effective for being put in these terms:

> The moonlight streamed down upon the yard, throwing into relief every part of it, revealing the dilapidated fence, the ramshackle range of rooms, the little superior two-roomed cottage on the other side of the yard, the odds and ends of things scattered all about. The poverty of the place stood confessed, and Jane, seated on a box by the threshold of her friend's room, had before her eyes the material evidence of the sort of life which most of her class must live. Not improbably some of them had dreamt dreams such as hers; their fancy had been as free. (Jane's Career, p.207)

And de Lisser does not allow his heroine's nostalgia to produce a dissipating effect:

> Sometimes she thought of her home in the country; and far away it seemed, up there amongst the mountains, half-lost, dreaming its monotonous, half-idle existence away. She wondered how her friends were getting on, what had become of her sister, whether Mrs. Mason had written to tell her mother that she had run off without a word. All this she thought of at intervals but with no regrets, she did not wish to return; and she felt that, if her people had heard what she had done, they must have accepted the fact as quite natural. (Jane's Career, p.212)

Jane's isolation in this long section of the novel faces de Lisser with several alternatives. She could be presented in omniscient narrative as a pathetic being; the comic-vulgar dialect could be modified into a language of soliloquy and reflection as in Samuel Selvon's later A Brighter Sun (1952); or the author could represent the character's thoughts and feelings through a mixture of "objective" narration and free reportage. As the illustrations show, de Lisser followed the third course. The choice is significant since it shows that de Lisser's breakthrough in the presentation of the Negro as person is still limited by a social attitude to the language of the Negro. But in Jane's Career the chosen technique articulates the obscure West Indian peasant for the first time in fiction. Although this novel itself is marred by de Lisser's inept handling of the success of Jane, and although de Lisser's attitude to his West Indian raw material becomes increasingly alien and unsympathetic Jane's Career belongs in art and in orientation to the West Indian canon.

Other publications of the period suggest that there was continuous literary activity in the island. But little of what was recovered from the newspapers or turned from manuscript into print is of literary interest. Apart from the activities of the middle-class Poetry League of Jamaica the following publications, mainly short stories are known: 'Martha Brae' by Tom Redcam, a story of Spanish Jamaica in the joint publication with Rev. J. W. Graham Round the Blue Light (Jamaica Times Printery, 1918); The Cacique's Treasure and Other Tales by Alexander MacG. James, published by the Gleaner Co. in 1920; One Jamaica Gal by Alice Drurie, published by the Times Printery in 1939; Rain for the Plains and Other Stories by Cicely Waite-Smith published by the Gleaner Co. in 1943; Claude Thompson's These My People (The Herald Ltd. Printers 194?) and R. L. C. Aarons The Cow that Laughed and Other Stories (Kingston 194?) also appeared in this period; two collections of Archie Lindo's work published by the College Press, Jamaica contain short stories: Bronze (1944) was followed by My Heart was Singing 1945; finally, two collections by Roger Mais are of special significance in view of this author's novels published in the 1950's. The collections are: Face and Other Stories (Universal Printery 194?) and And Most of All Man (City Printery 194?). I have given printing details in the text because I want to illustrate the part that the newspapers of the period and private printeries played in the literary life of the island. A great deal of research remains to be done rescuing lost literature from the ephemeral publications in the islands since 1900.

There were more books published in Jamaica during the period under discussion than in any other territory. In Guyana, the first work of prose fiction in book form was A. R. F. Webber's Those That Be In Bondage: A Tale of East Indian Indentures and Sunlit Western Waters (1917), printed by The Daily Chronicle Printing Press, Georgetown, Demerara. Webber was "of very fair complexion (what is called

locally musti or colony white)"[83]. He was like de Lisser, a journalist involved in public life. Like Redcam he was a nationalist. But Webber's fiction is of the poorest quality, nor was he a propagandist for literature or for a national literature.

Alfred Raymond Forbes Webber was born in Tobago in 1879. At the age of twenty he joined his uncle's merchant business in Guyana and made the territory his place of permanent residence. Webber was quick to enter public life. "In his desire to make a place rapidly for himself in the country of his adoption," writes P. H. Daly, "Webber dared not allow anything to establish itself by slow growth. He was always in action, always forcing the pace, and forcing it recklessly..."[84]. Daly argues that Webber's political associates were disreputable (Nelson Cannon and The Popular Party, described by Daly as "an ingathering of political hybrids"); and that as a newspaper editor (the Daily Chronicle 1919-1925, the New Daily Chronicle 1926-1930) this relatively impecunious near-white Creole often echoed the opinions of his financial masters; nevertheless, "he is a slanderer who taunts that Webber did not work for a prosperous and self-governing Guiana with all the sincerity and zeal which a patriotic Guianese has ever placed on the shrine of Mother Guiana."[85]. The turbulent career in which "the missing man" strove continuously against "the circus man"[86] in the public eye, was ended when Webber died in 1932, a year after the publication of his best-known work, the Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana.

---

[83] N. E. Cameron, personal communication, May 30, 1967.

[84] P. H. Daly Story of the Heroes, III, (The Daily Chronicle, Guyana, 1943) p.310. I am indebted to Miss Marilyn Matthew-Li of The Library, University of Guyana for providing a photo-copy of Chapter XXV 'A. R. F. Webber' from Daly's rare work.

[85] Daly, p.310.

[86] The terms are used by Daly.

There are few signs of the Guyanese nationalist in Those That Be In Bondage, and the work is hardly distinguishable from the exotica of European writers. The setting shifts from a Guyana of sugar estates, indentured Indians and sugar aristocracy to an idyllic Tobago of childhood, and then back to a Guyana where the Roman Catholic Church is expanding. The action begins with the unconventional marriage between an Englishman Edwin Hamilton, and an indentured Indian girl, Bibi. The novelette ends with the renunciation of Holy Orders by the priest Harold Walton and a coming together between him and his half-caste cousin Marjorie Hamilton. Between these two events is a recounting of adolescence on the romantic island of Tobago where Harold and Marjorie grow up with hearts in sympathetic communion.

The romantic tale of "sunlit western waters" contains a predictable amount of sensationalism in the incidents, and tourist-like descriptions of the island. The tale also contains information about the sugar industry; it is made to carry journalistic essays by an intrusive author, firstly against the indenture system and later, against a binding Roman Catholicism.

Webber's exotic view of his Indian characters is disappointing enough, coming from an insider, but this view sometimes clashes with his equally unfortunate positing of Bibi as an exceptional Indian. When Abdul Karim a disappointed lover accuses Bibi of living with Edwin Hamilton, primitive blood is roused:

> The warrior spirit of generations of Afridis, which coursed through her father's veins sprang into being in the daughter's. Without a moment's warning Bibi flew at the throat of her accuser and before Karim had time to recover he was stretch full length on the earthen floor of the little hut which old Singh had made his home. There could be little doubt about the ultimate outcome of such a struggle; but old Singh, arriving on the scene immediately, put an end to what must have otherwise terminated very disastrously for the woman: for these primitive natures exhibit none of the chivalry which is usually found in more developed minds, where a struggle with a woman is concerned; Karim thereupon took his departure, swearing vengeance on Edwin - not the woman. (Those That Be In Bondage, p.26)

Sensation reaches a peak when Karim, armed with his cutlass, makes an attack upon Edwin: in the bedroom struggle Karim uses Edwin's gun to kill the successful rival.

Bibi, now Mrs. Hamilton and just delivered of a daughter, dies in the excitement. At his trial, Karim retires into impenetrable Oriental silence.

Years later, on the island of Tobago, the daughter of Bibi and Edwin is involved in another bondage situation. Harold Walton, trained in Europe as a priest returns to the place of his youth and breaks his vows for love of his cousin. At the end he is called upon to choose between Mother Church and Marjorie. The girl suggests they should go into exile and "make a little Tobago Colony in London" where as Ursula Singh she will earn an income by her pen:

> Harold, roused under the enthusiasm of his young kinswoman, raised his head and asked slowly and sweetly:
> 'And you and I, Marjorie? I have lost my freedom, which I expected.'
> The old Marjorie again flashed out:
> 'I tell you Harold, I am not in bondage to this Church: never have been and never will be.' But in an istant the new Marjorie had returned: lowering her voice to the softness of a caress she added, 'Harold, at St. Seriols we stood together at the Great White Altar: what more do you want?
> Then, laying her hand on his she murmured 'Come, son', and raising him to his feet she folded him to her bosom.
> Harold, as in a dream, raised his head and looked full into the depths of her eyes; and then their lips met in one long lingering caress. Soft as night and sweet as death. (Those That Be In Bondage, p.236)

A self-consciously literary style, pervasive romanticising, tactless narrative technique and an episodic structure make Those That Be In Bondage a justly neglected work.

But its neglect has had little to do with its weaknesses as fiction. Webber's novel was not published outside Guyana, and it was addressed to a necessarily small audience in Guyanese society. A more popular tradition was being built up in the newspapers of the period. In Thoughts on Life and Literature (Persick Printers, Georgetown, 1950) N. E. Cameron reprints a lecture delivered to the Georgetown Shorthand Writers Association in 1930 in which he had noted: "There are a few writers who have dealt with local foibles. 'Sarah's Sayings' of Van Sertima are still fresh in the minds of many, while E. N. W[illegible] in 1917 published 'Sidelights on local life" - a humorous treatment of many phases and abuses of

local life."[87] These publications grew out of dialect columns in the newspapers and are paralleled elsewhere in the West Indies. In 1943, Vincent Roth edited a collection from the Daily Chronicle all by the popular columnist "Pugagee Puncuss": Old Time Story[88] is a reminder of the part played by newspapers in this period, and a convenient representation of the dialect tradition which persists in more stylistically varied forms in West Indian writing.

In addition to noting island publications in the pre-1950 period, we have to follow several movements: the coming together of literary aspirants in clubs and societies in the separate territories; a growing realisation of a literary community across the territories; and a turning of eyes towards London as a possible satisfying base for artistic and literary operations. These trends were latent from the beginning: de Lisser had had works published in England in 1914 and 1915; Redcam had sought to bring writers together in The All Jamaica Library, and had sent books for review to the other islands; The Poetry League of Jamaica had been founded in 1923 and drew a certain class of writers together; in Barbados in the early 1830's the Young Men's Progressive Club came into being;[89] and in Guyana in 1930 was founded The B.G. Literary Society. Its first president N. E. Cameron lectured extensively on 'The Necessity for Local Literature', and published in 1931 an anthology, Guianese Poetry covering the period 1831 to 1931.[90] In Vol. II of his The Evolution of the Negro,[91] Cameron surveyed works by other West Indian writers.

---

[87] 'Guianese Literature, Past, Present and Future' in Thoughts on Life and Literature. See p. 62.

[88] Old Time Story: some old Guianese yarns re-spun by "Pugagee Puncuss" (C. H. McLellan) ed. Vincent Roth, Georgetown, British Guiana, Daily Chronicle (1943).

[89] The special significance of this organisation will become apparent later in this chapter.

[90] Published on a royalty basis by The Argosy Co. Ltd., Guyana. Local publications are and were usually done at the authors' expense.

[91] The Evolution of the Negro Vol. I (1929) Vol. II (1934) published by The Argosy Co. Ltd., Georgetown. See pp. 107-110 of Vol. II Bk. II.

It is necessary to record all these developments if we are to understand the simultaneity of post-1950 developments in the different islands, and if we are to modify a little the metaphor of "explosion" which has been used to describe the West Indian literary events of the 1950's and 1960's. In Trinidad in the late 1920's and early 1930's, however, there was a concentration of literary, and artistic talent such as had never occurred in the West Indies before. Social and political conditions were not yet sufficiently advanced to allow of this group's activities reaching out as an influence upon the lives of the Trinidad masses, but as we shall see, they were not just a prestige group meeting for civilised intercourse.

The two central figures in the Trinidad group were a Portuguese Creole Alfred H. Mendes and a Negro, C. L. R. James. Mendes, born in 1897 was sent to Hitchin Grammar School in England at the age of eight. At the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Rifle Brigade, fought in France and Flanders, was gassed in 1917 and was hospitalised in Sheffield for nearly a year. In 1922, Mendes returned to Trinidad where he married a Portuguese girl who died after giving birth to a son. For a short while Mendes went vagabonding in the United States but returned to Trinidad to marry again. "By this time I was up to my neck in trouble with all authority and regarded with fear and suspicion by all respectable people in the island. My friends were the iconoclasts and the creative people including C. L. R. James and Albert Gomes."[92]

C. L. R. James was born in 1901. Unlike Mendes, he attended school in Trinidad. James entered Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain in January 1911, a government exhibitioner and an obvious candidate for an island scholarship:

---

[92]Alfred H. Mendes, personal communication September 10, 1964. A second letter of October 7, 1964 is also in my possession. The account of Mendes' activities is based largely upon these letters: further quotations from them will be followed in the text by the word "Mendes" without footnotes.

> It was only long years after that I understood the limitation on spirit, vision, and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal - to attain it was, of course, impossible. Both masters and boys accepted it as in the very nature of things. The masters could not be offensive about it because they thought it was their function to do this, if they thought about it at all; and, as for me, it was the beacon that beckoned me on.[93]

In different ways, both James and Mendes were given an English education, but both men were able to appropriate the tradition with which they started.

In the late 'twenties, these two men met with several others to exchange ideas, listen to music, and to discuss the social and political condition of the island. A key member of the group was Carlton Comma a young librarian (now Senior Librarian of the Trinidad Public Library): "We kept on asking him for things [books] and he kept on finding them".[94] A notable figure was Altert Gomes, later to bulk large in Trinidad political life. For three years (some time between 1925 and 1928) these men published a magazine called The Beacon.[95] Mendes writes:

> The Beacon was, of course, the best organ of opinion in Trinidad - and nothing touching it for intelligence, wit, satire and general excellence has since appeared in Trinidad. Nothing at all. It created a furore of excitement in the island ... and it set people everywhere thinking and talking as they had never talked or thought before. Those were the days! ... The Beacon took anything into its maw, anything that was fresh, good intelligent - stories, articles on politics, race, music - reviews of books, of music recitals, of art exhibitions - controversial letters, stimulating editorial notes written by Gomes (Gomes was essentially a polemist and not a politician or writer. He tried his hand some years ago at writing novels and failed dismally. A lively intelligent fellow. Like myself, Portuguese) by Sidney Harland, myself, Algernon Wharton, Sonny [H. McD] Carpenter (an excellent music critic. Trinidadian of course, white) F. V. S. Evans, Nello (C.L.R.) James and so on. We had 3 rip-roaring years of tearing into every sanctity and pharisaism of the respectable folk. How hurt they were - but how much they secretly enjoyed it!

---

[93] C. L. R. James Beyond a Boundary (1963) pp. 38-39

[94] C. L. R. James, personal interview, Carlton Hotel, Edinburgh, February, 27, 1964.

[95] I have not seen copies of The Beacon but a file is supposed to exist in the Port of Spain Public Library.

"Those were the days" indeed. The iconoclasm of the Beacon group marks the beginning of a social protest tradition in West Indian writing. It is worth noticing that the group were able to carry on their iconoclastic activities in the days of Colonial Office rule. It is difficult to imagine that a similar group would be allowed to function freely anywhere in the post-Independence West Indies.

By 1928 The Beacon group had begun breaking up. But its key members, Mendes and James were still operating together. In 1929 they edited and published the magazine Trinidad: Short Stories/Articles and Poems. This was the Xmas number. Volume I No. 2 appeared at Easter 1930, edited by Alfred H. Mendes and called Trinidad: An Occasional Review of Literature and Affairs.[96] In 'Editorial Notes' to the 1930 issue Mendes outlined the factors necessary for the magazine's survival: "First, the continued support of the advertising community; secondly, sufficient interest on the part of the public to subscribe to the periodical at the inevitably higher price of one shilling and sixpence; and lastly, the co-operation of anyone aspiring to contribute to the growth of cultural life in the West Indies. Our aim is to afford our fellow men and women an opportunity of self-expression...".[97]

The two issues of Trinidad created a sensation in Trinidad because of the pungent realism and the unreserved character of the writing. Mendes and James had begun the literature of the yard. James' story 'Triumph' represents this

---

[96]The Xmas 1929 issue included, stories: 'Miss Winter' and 'Booze and the Goberdaw' by R. A. C. de Boissiere; 'The Thirteenth Spirit' by Joseph da Silva; 'Her Chinaman's Way' and 'Faux Pas' by Alfred H. Mendes; 'Off Shore' by F. V. S. Evans; 'Triumph' and 'Turner's Prosperity' by C. L. R. James. H. McD Carpenter wrote on 'Pianists and Violinists on the Gramophone'. Other contributors were A. C. Farrell and Algernon Wharton. The Easter 1930 issue included poems by John Vickers, E. Adolph Carr and A. H. Mendes and stories as follows: 'The Answer' by Kathleen M. Archibald; 'On a Time' and 'The Last Lot' by F. V. S. Evans; 'A Trip to Town' by R. A. C. de Boissiere; 'Rene de Malmatre' by E. G. Benson; 'The Pipe' by J. I. Da Silva; 'News' by Alfred H. Mendes and a Review by 'A.J.S.' of five novels including Banjo by Claude McKay, A High Wind in Jamaica by Richard Hughes and Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms.

[97]Trinidad Vol. I, No. 2 p.57.

school of social realism and compassionate protest at its best: "Every street in Port of Spain proper can show you numerous examples of the type [of slum dwelling]: a narrow gateway leading into a fairly big yard, on either side of which run long low buildings, consisting of anything from four to eighteen rooms, each about twelve feet square. In these live and have always lived, the porters, prostitutes, carter-man, washerwomen, and domestic servants of the city."[98] Redcam had introduced low-life characters in One Brown Girl And - (1909), and so had Snod in Maroon Medicine (1905) but it is with James and Mendes for the first time that the lower-class West Indian peasant becomes a centre of sustained and serious interest.

The story begins with a depressed Mamitz in depressing surroundings. "She was shortish and fat, voluptuously developed, tremendously developed, and as a creole loves development in a woman more than any other extraneous allure, Mamitz was to it when she moved that you missed none of her charms." In the literature of the yard, sex and an uninhibited approach by the writers are basic. Mamitz' man has beaten her a few times and finally left her, so "Mamitz, from being the most prosperous woman in the yard, had sunk gradually to being the most destitute. Despite her very obvious attractions, no man took notice of her." To explain this sudden catastrophe, Mamitz' friend Celestine invokes obeah, another ingredient in this type of literature:

> 'Somebody do you something', said Celestine with conviction. 'Nobody goin' to change my mind from that. An' if you do what I tell you, you will t'row off this black spirit that on you...
> Mamitz said nothing.

In the little world of the yard, loyalties are fierce, hostility violent; the friend of today becomes the enemy of tomorrow; and everybody knows what everybody else is doing. Celestine attributes Mamitz' misfortune to Irene's trafficking

---

[98]Quotations are from the original magazine. The story has been re-printed by Andrew Salkey in Caribbean Stories (1965).

with the supernatural and decides to counter with a mid-night bush-bath: "At mid-night with the necessary rites and ceremonies, Ave Marias and Pater Nosters, she bathed Mamitz in a large bath-pan full of water prepared with gully-root, fever-grass, lime leaves, guerir tout, herbe a femmes and other roots, leaves and grasses noted for their efficacy... against malign plots and influences."

With Mamitz at the centre, James skilfully builds up our sense of the yard's moves: throwing words, the Sunday cook-up, rum-drinking, the uncertainty about how long the current man will remain in touch and the resolute assertion of life against the odds. When Mamitz begins to prosper again and has two men (Popo the unsteady man of pleasure and Nicholas the butcher who pays the rent) Irene tries to make mischief by fetching Nicholas at an unexpected hour. Celestine warns Mamitz, and Popo is hustled away. Violence and dialect come together characteristically in the episode that follows:

> ... Nicholas, still in his bloody butcher's apron came hot foot into the yard. He went straight up to Mamitz and seized her by the throat.
> 'Where the hell is that man you had in the room with you - the room I payin' rent for?'
> 'Don't talk dam foolishness man, Le'mme go', said Mamitz.
> 'I will stick my knife into you as I will stick it in a cow. You had Popo des Vignes in that room for the whole day. Speak the truth, you dog.'
> 'You mother, you's sister, you' aunt, you' wife was the dog' shrieked Mamitz, quoting one of Celestine's most brilliant pieces of repartee.

The self-conscious introduction of episodes like this shocked the more respectable and English oriented members of the Trinidad educated class, in much the same way that the Harlem writers of the late 1920's and early 1930's had shocked the Negro American conservatives anxious to be acceptable to White Americans. In the 'Editorial Notes' to the second issue of Trinidad, Mendes quotes The Trinidad Guardian of December 22, 1929 on the impact of the Xmas 1929 number:

> Letters protesting against the obscenities of the Magazine have been pouring into the Guardian office during the past week. One is from a Boy Scout who says: 'It's disagreeable implications cast unwarrantable aspersions on the fair name of our beautiful Island.' Another letter describes the volume as 'nasty'. The writer fears that other young writers will think it smart to be the same.[99]

---

[99] Trinidad Vol. I. No. 2 p.56.

Mendes also quotes a remark by a Mr. James Belmont that "'Faux Pas' is the most revolting thing I have ever come across." And C. L. R. James stated in a personal interview (noted above) that 'Triumph' caused disorder in the island.

The story ends in fact with the purest compassion. Having foiled Irene's plan, Mamitz plasters the inside of her door with dollar notes and flings it open in full view of Irene. The ladies of the yard taunt the mischief-maker:

> Bertha, Josephine, the fat Mamitz and the rest were laughing so that they could hardly hold themselves up. Irene could find neither spirit nor voice to reply. She trembled so that her hands shook. The china bowl in which she was washing rice slipped from her fingers and broke into half a dozen pieces while the rice streamed into the dirty water of the canal.

But the task of Mendes and James and their associates was a two-fold one: to get their country-men to read, and at the same time to teach them how to read. A brave attempt to explain how fiction works was made in 'A Commentary' by the editor of Trinidad, issue number 2:

> ...[T]he creative artist is primarily concerned with the weaving of patterns: the material that he uses is so much grist to his mill, for he who is sincere about his literary work (or any other art-work for that matter) cannot stop to consider how much ugliness there is in the matter that comes his way. It would be silly to tell the architect not to build in stone because stone is rough and amorphous; to warn the sculptor to leave bronze alone because bronze is brown and blatant is like warning the priest and parson against heathens because they have no regard for our anthropomorphic god; even so it is futile and puerile to ask the writer of fiction to leave bodies and barrack-yards alone because they are obscene in the popular sense. It all depends on what literary treatment they receive, though it does not necessarily mean that, so treated, they shall be no longer obscenities; it simply means that they shall be obscenities presented for reasons other than raising the disgust or sexual desires of the reader.[100]

The Trinidad audience was interested in respectability, not in questions of art. But while the Port-of-Spain bourgeois were hostile, there were patrons' eyes in England. As early as October 15, 1927, James had had a story 'La Divana Pastora' published in the Saturday Review. It was reprinted by E. J. O'brien in Best Short Stories of 1928 (1928). Mendes' The Poet's Quest, a long poem had been published by Heath, Cranton Ltd. in 1927. 'Lai John' by Algernon Wharton and Mendes (a re-working of Mendes' original 'Her Chinaman's Way') appeared in

---

[100] Trinidad Vol. I, No. 2 p.65.

The London Mercury for January 1929 and in O'brien's Best Short Stories of 1929. In the anthology O'brien listed 'Torrid Zone' by Mendes as worthy of notice.[101] Meanwhile Aldous Huxley who had known Mendes in England wrote to congratulate him on the magazine Trinidad.

In 1930, Mendes set off for the United States from where he sent his first novel Pitch Lake, written mainly in Trinidad, to the publisher's Duckworth. The work appeared in 1934 with an introduction by Aldous Huxley and sold 4,000 copies. In the following year, Duckworth also issued Black Fauns a novel written by Mendes in the United States. "During the period 1925-1940 I was writing like mad. I had actually completed 12 novels by 1937, 10 of which, in a fit of despair, I destroyed. I know now that all of them were publishable. By 1937 I had written about 100 short stories, a number of them appearing in the literary magazines in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, London and Paris. E. J. O'Brien anthologised 2 of my stories, John Lehmann another and H. E. Bates another. Pari passu with all of this I was doing ... book reviews for the New York papers and articles for the high-paying American magazines. But the life was fast, hard and precarious." (Mendes: letter). Mendes returned to Trinidad in 1940, gave up writing and never returned to it in the creative sense. The silenced author joined the civil service in Trinidad and retired as General Manager of the Port Services department.

Pitch Lake is a staggering account of the deracination of a Portuguese youth torn between the sordid shop-keeping world of his father, and the hollow social world of second generation Portuguese who have made good in Port of Spain. Mendes' craftsmanship is not as smooth or as flexible as Naipaul's, but Pitch Lake is a fierce indictment of a colonial society which can only offer alternative ways of

---

[101] O'brien anthologised another Mendes story 'Lulu Gets Married' in 1936; and John Lehmann included the same writer's 'Afternoon in Trinidad' in Penguin New Writing 6, May 1941. I have been unable to trace another story which Mendes claims was anthologised by H. E. Bates.

death to its members. Even more impressive is Mendes' rendering of the tortured consciousness of his unstable central character. By narrating strictly from Joe da Costa's point of view, Mendes allows us to experience the character's fear and insecurity, his vaccillation, his disgust at others and an almost inseperable self-contempt. In the final chapter he goes berserk, murders Stella the Indian girl who is pregnant by him and strikes out into the night. To his tortured mind, Stella comes to represent all that prevents him from moving smoothly into the socialite world of his brother and sister-in-law. To the reader, the pitch lake that Joe seeks to identify outside himself, also wells up from within. Mendes' achievement in this novel is to allow us to measure Joe's inadequacy and confusion, while persuading us of the value of the human character's struggle for integrity. There is a loss of concentration in the highly exotic Black Fauns set in a yard and episodically constructed about the lives of a cast of man-hunting, dialect-speaking, slum-dwelling ladies. Mendes plays the local colour for all it is worth. The author's capacity for rendering states of stress occurs once more, however, in Martha a brooding character with a lesbian past who falls in love with Snakey, Ma Christine's garishly dressed son just back from America. Snakey uncomprehendingly uses Martha's vulnerability and her fixation with him to procure money for Mamitz who has whetted his lust. Martha's derangement upon discovering the way in which she has been abused is intensified by her memory of betrayal by her lesbian lover, Estelle. Mendes the novelist of abnormal states is equal to the opportunities created in this character, but there is no dominating figure in the novel as a whole; and there are long stretches of unmotivated and artless polemics. At best, Black Fauns is a compassionate exposition of lower class slum life.

We must remind ourselves that although Mendes lived in the United States from 1930 to 1940 his novels were handled by a British Publisher. C. L. R. James set out for England in March 1932: "I was about to enter the arena where I was to play the

role for which I had prepared myself. The British intellectual was going to Britain... I would publish The Case for West Indian Self-Government under its West Indian title, The Life of Captain Cipriani and send it back to the West Indies. Then I would be free to get down to my own business. I had a completed novel with me. But that was only my 'prentice hand. Contrary to accepted experience, the real magnum opus was to be my second novel."[102] James' long and varied career cannot be described satisfactorily here but one might break it conveniently into rough periods. Although he came to Britain to be a writer of fiction, he soon became involved in international socialism. From 1933 to 1938 in Britain, he reported cricket for the Manchester Guardian and then the Glasgow Herald, worried over West Indian problems with Learie Constantine who had been his first refuge in England, and became involved in a small Trotskyite group of about thrity-five members.[103] The next period 1938 to 1953 was spent in the United States writing in Trotskyite journals and lecturing in the country: in this period he began to question Trotskyism and broke with the movement in 1951. James was expelled from the United States as an alien and as one unsuitable to be made an American citizen.[104] The years 1953 to 1958 were spent mainly in Britain where James began work on his partly autobiographical account of the relationship between cricket and society with special reference to the West Indies.[105] In 1958, he returned to the West Indies as an honoured guest of the new federal government, and remained to edit the Nation, the offical newspaper of the ruling People's

---

[102] C. L. R. James Beyond a Boundary (1963) p.119.

[103] Publications in this period were: The Life of Captain Cipriani (1933), The Case for West Indian Self-Government (1933), Minty Alley, a novel, (1936), World Revolution: the Rise and Fall of the Communist International (1937) A History of Negro Revolt (1938) and his highly acclaimed study of Toussaint L'Ouverture - The Black Jacobins (1938).

[104] The main publications in this period are to be found in scattered journals but Mariners Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the world we live in was published as a book in N.Y. in 1953.

[105] Beyond a Boundary was published in 1963.

National Movement in Trinidad. The Prime Minister, Eric Williams, an Oxford Ph.D., had learnt much from James at an earlier period. A break between James and Williams over party organisation as against personal rule brought James back to England in 1962 where for the next three years, from his house at 20 Staverton Road, London, the physically frail but intellectually vigorous West Indian exercised great influence on the thinking of his younger compatriots. Returning to the West Indies as a cricket correspondent for the London Times in 1965, James was placed under house arrest in Trinidad and remained to fight an election at which his party was resoundingly defeated. The people of Trinidad and Tobago knew nothing of the life and work of the outstanding West Indian of his own generation and of the next. In London again in 1967, James continues to be a rallying point for the West Indian community.

James' career has been the unpredictable outcome of a journey towards an audience begun in 1932. Of the fiction he actually produced the short stories seem to be more successful in a conventional sense, but I would like to glance briefly at what looks like something less orthodox in the novel Minty Alley (1936). Haynes, a young middle-class West Indian has gorwn up under the protection of his mother and of a faithful family servant called Ella. With the death of his mother he feels the "need to make a break" (p.11) and this coincides with the necessity, on financial grounds, to let the house, give up the servant, and take lodgings at some inexpensive place. Thus plausibly, does the bookish young man come to live at No. 2 Minty Alley.

At Minty Alley, Haynes learns about life. His superior social position and his obvious tolerance make him confidant and judge in the yard; as a curious outsider he follows the development of the clandestine affair between Mrs. Rouse's lover Benoit and the nurse who is a lodger in the house; he witnesses Mrs. Rouse's suffering when the affair comes to light and when Benoit marries the nurse; he records Mrs. Rouse's

inability to forget Benoit and her love for him even when he has been deserted by the nurse. At the same time, James prevents the young man from being simply a passive and ideal spectator by charting the degrees by which he comes to have his first sexual affair with Maisie the fire-brand of the yard. At the end of the novel, with Benoit dead and Maisie gone away to the United States, the Minty Alley set breaks up. Haynes finds new lodgings but often returns nostalgically to the now respectable site where so much had happened in other days.

The main interest of Minty Alley is not in Haynes' dramatic existence as a character, but in the discovery of common and heroic humanity in the sordid affairs of the yard. James establishes Haynes plausibly as a lodger in the yard, and makes it credible that through curiosity and an interest in Maisie he should wish to remain but this also makes Haynes a convincing authorial device for expressing the life of No. 3 Minty Alley.

The use of Haynes' limited perspective as the novel's point of view makes for vividness in the people of Minty Alley since they can only reveal themselves to him in speech or in action. James' control of linguistic varieties is crucial in the portrayal of Maisie, for instance:

> I am Mrs. Rouse's niece. Why she always taking up for the coolie? Everything is only Philomen, Philomen, Philomen. If I and the girl have a little disagreement, Philomen always right, I always in the wrong. Philomen is a servant. She shouldn't have more privilege than me.
>
> Don't speak so loudly, Maisie. You see, Mrs. Rouse says that Philomen helps her. And you don't give much assistance.
>
> But, Mr. Haynes, Philomen working. She must work. What I must help Mrs. Rouse for? For the scraps of food and clothes she give me?
>
> Philomen works very hard. She is a good girl.
>
> Good girl, she! Mr. Haynes, what you saying? Maisie laughed shortly. 'All those clothes you see her putting on on a Sunday, I could get it if I want to get it as she get them. She is the worst little prostitute in Victoria.
>
> Now, Maisie -
>
> But I have to speak about it, Mr. Haynes. If I don't tell you you wouldn't know. All of you only holding up Philomen as if she is a model. I'm speaking the truth. That same Philomen you praising up so much she used to live with Mr. Mill, the druggist, and Bennett, the assistant. And when old Mills find out he sack Bennett. Two of them the same time.
>
> (Minty Alley, pp. 124-125)

The vividness of the Minty Alley lodgers is one expression of life's triumph over narrow surroundings.

But James' narrative point of view restores the characters in a more fundamental sense. Since Haynes cannot know what they are thinking or doing when they are out of the range of his observation, the characters retain autonomy as familiar but not fully known beings. Each has a mysterious life of his own. It is in this way that the comings and goings of Benoit, for instance, are fraught with possibilities. In part, this gives dramatic plausibility to Mrs. Rouse's inability to forget Benoit. Haynes' limited perspective gives an impression of depth to the presented life of the novel in another way. Because he registers, without being able to explain the curious fixation of Mrs. Rouse upon Benoit we are made to feel that there are hidden resources even in the hedged-in people of yard.

To read the novel like this is to do too much justice to what is sometimes only latent in the narrative technique but I am trying to suggest that Minty Alley is more than just social documentation like Black Fauns, and that the inconclusiveness of the novel when we skim off the story is a sign that James was drifting as an artist away from the straight novel of character towards the expression of less "known" states. There is some justification for this view in James' Black Jacobins (1938) where, in a similar intuitive way, Toussaint's evoked life constantly breaks out of the historian's documentary frame. "The failure to contain Toussaint", writes the most penetrative of West Indian theorists of the imagination, "sheds a certain paradoxical light beyond the historical framework James set up, upon the seeds of tragedy which are native to a cultural environment whose promise of fulfilment lies in a profound and difficult vision of the person - a profound and difficult vision of essential unity within the most bitter forms of latent and active historical diversity."[106]

---

[106] Wilson Harris Tradition and the West Indian Novel published by the West Indian Students Union, London, 1964.

The failure of the Beacon-Trinidad group to establish literary and artistic life in Trinidad and the dependence upon and emigration to England in the 1930's anticipated the West Indian cultural pattern of the 1940's and 1950's.

The popular discontents that swept the West Indian islands between 1934 and 1938 mark the beginnings of modern West Indian nationalisms. The discontents owed their immediate origins to the conomic depression of the 1930's but they cannot be separated from the Pan-African and Pan-Negro movements of the twentieth century; nor would they have become so articulate had the effects of popular education in the West Indies not begun to be operative. The nationalist ferment was intensified by the achievement of universal adult suffrage and improved political constitutions in most of the territories. The new spirit showed itself in the founding of the periodicals. "Kyk-over-al we hope will be an instrument to help forge a Guianese people, to make them conscious of their intellectual and spiritual possibilities. There's so much we can do as a people if we can get together more, and with this magazine as an outlet, the united cultural organisations can certainly build, we believe, some achievement of common pride in the literary world, without detracting in the least from their group aims or autonomy."[107] Even more directly connected with the national movement was Focus, founded in Jamaica in 1943 by the sculptress Edna Manley, wife of the labour leader Norman Manley who became Chief Minister of Jamaica in 1955: "Great and irrevocable changes have swept this land of ours in the last few years and out of these changes a new art is springing. Historically, art gives a picture of contemporary life: philosophically, it contains within it the germs of the future. This collection of short stories, essays and plays and poems fills both these roles; in them is the picture of our life today, the way we think, the acts we do; but underlying the picture of the present is the trend of the

---

[107] A. J. Seymour's editorial in the first (December 1945) issue of Kyk-over-al.

future, where new values will predominate and a new approach to things will be born."[108] Thus, hopefully, Edna Manley. In Barbados, with less ceremony, Frank Collymore, Therold Barnes and a few other members of the Young Men's Progressive Club decided to enlarge The Y.M.P.C. Journal and so launched Bim in December 1942. "If Bim has any policy other than that of fostering creative writing, it has been one of encouragement. If at times some contributions did not merit such encouragement little harm has been done. At least they did not deprive better writers of a chance."[109] Without political affiliations like Focus, without a theory of literature such as that generated by Harris, Seymour and Carter in Kyk-over-al, and blessed with an ability to survive one financial crisis after another in the philistinism of West Indian society, Bim has caught on and grown into the most West Indian periodical in the islands.[110]

If Bim brought West Indian writers together within the same covers for the first time, it also helped to point them towards England. In 1946, Henry Swanzy became editor of the B.B.C's 'Caribbean Voices'. The free trade between the two institutions was of mutual advantage. Bim gave the permanence of print, 'Caribbean Voices' supplied cash and the promise of a literary future in England. Not until 1964 did the University of the West Indies recognise the importance of this programme in the development of West Indian writing. The present writer's letter to the Professor of English met this response: "Thanks for your letter about

---

[108] Edna Manley in the Foreword to the 1943 Focus. Quoted by G. R. Coulthard in 'The West Indies' in The Commonwealth Pen ed. McLeod, (N.Y.: 1961) p.192.

[109] F. Collymore 'The Story of Bim' in Bim Vol. 10 No. 38 (Jan-June 1964) p.68.

[110] Two recent articles on Bim and on Kyk-over-al are of special interest. In 'Kyk-over-al and the Radicals', L. E. Braithwaite gives a rough content analysis and argues that Seymour's magazine was never revolutionary in spite of editorial declarations; in 'Frank Collymore and the Miracle of Bim', Edward Baugh adds to Collymore's piece cited above. See New World Guyana Independence Issue April 1966, and Barbados Independence Issue Vol. III Nos. 1 and 2, 1946. Published by New World Group Ltd., Kingston, Jamaica.

'Caribbean Voices'. I quite agree with you that we ought to have the MSS here and I have started things moving. It so happens that the man whom you mention as 'a Mr. Lindo' who acted as editor out here for the programme is now the University's Public Relations Officer, and he has written to the B.B.C. about it." The letter was signed by Patrick Cruttwell, Professor. The effort seems to have been abortive. Subsequent correspondence between the Library of the University of the West Indies and the B.B.C. led to the predictable ceremonial presentation of the set of "Caribbean Voices" scripts to the University by the B.B.C. in May 1966. The scripts remain to be analysed, but two collections of verse have been mined from them already.

The encouragement offered by Henry Swanzy in the late 1940's and early 1950's came at a time when the establishment of the University of the West Indies (1948) and the journal of the Extra-Mural Department Caribbean Quarterly (1949) might have been expected to consolidate the efforts of the earlier periodicals. There was no counter-attraction to London, however George Lamming describes Port of Spain culture of the late 1940's:

> ... You see the magic of the B.B.C. box. From Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and other islands, poems and short stories were sent to England; and from a London studio in Oxford Street, the curriculum for a serious all-night argument was being prepared. These writers had to argue among themselves and against the absent English critic. It was often repetitive since there were no people to talk with. The educated middle class had 'no time for them'; and the dancing girls in the Diamond Horse Shoe simply didn't know what it was all about.[111]

'Caribbean Voices' was not the only calling sound from England.

Returning from a visit to Jamaica, Robert Herring, editor of Life and Letters, wrote in an editorial of January 1948:

> There is as yet in Jamaica no general means of publishing books, such as exists in most other civilised countries in the world. That may sound hard of belief but it is true. There is no firm in Jamaica which exists simply and solely to publish books. There is no branch of a British publisher... It is not

---

[111]George Lamming The Pleasures of Exile (1960 pp. 66-67.

> much more than a hundred years - one hundred and ten, to be precise - since the end of slavery, but the fight against illiteracy has made enormous strides. The latest figures are that sixty per cent of the population are now literate ... There are Jamaican authors and have been for long, Constance Hollar, Claude McKay and Adolphe Roberts being perhaps the most famous. But there is no Jamaican publisher. Consequently, authors such as the last two I named go to America. If a Jamaican poet wishes to produce his slim volume he has to do so at his own expense... Until books can be published there can hardly be expected to be readers. A poet may write on a desert isle ... but readers can't read or develop in reading without books.

In February 1948, Herring announced that some chapters from a novel of Jamaica by Victor Reid were to be published in the March issue of Life and Letters. A completely Jamaican number would appear in April. So said, so done. Volume 57, April 1948, No. 128 contained articles by Phyllis Bottome, Lee Bailey ('Whose future in the Caribbean') Victor Reid and Wycliffe Bennet; poems by George Campbell, W. Adolphe Roberts, K. B. Scott, Vivian Virtue, Micky Hendricks, G. A. Hamilton, Basil McFarlane, Calvin Bowen and K. E. Ingram; and stories by Claude Thomson (2), W. G. Ogilvie, R. L. C. Aarons and Percy L. Miller. In November 1948, Herring went further and published a West Indian number. An article by Peter Blackman asked 'Is there a West Indian Literature?' and one by Ivan Lushington declared 'Greatness Amongst Us'. There were stories by G. W. Lamming, Clifford Sealy (2), Willy Richardson, Edgar Mittelholzer, and Victor Reid (2). The poets represented were Lamming, Barnabas J. Ramon-Fortune, C. L. Herbert, H. D. Carberry, K. E. Ingram, Roger Mais and Vivian Virtue.

With so much interest in England, the next step was inevitable. The Guianese writer, Edgar Mittelholzer arrived in London from Trinidad, in 1948: in 1950 his second novel A Morning at the Office was published by the Hogarth Press. In 1950 Samuel Selvon (Trinidad) and George Lamming (Barbados) made their journey to an expectation: Selvon's first novel A Brighter Sun (Allan Wingate) appeared in 1952; Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin was published by Michael Joseph a year later. 1953 saw the publication of a first novel by yet another West Indian: Jonathan Cape

published The Hills Were Joyful Together. Roger Mais had arrived from Jamaica in 1951. The deluge had begun.

In England, these writers were immediately recognised as "West Indians". They themselves had made the discovery after long years of insularity. Bim, 'Caribbean Voices' Life and Letters and the political movements towards federation began the process of recognition but it crystallised in England:

> It is here that one sees a discovery actually taking shape. No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St. Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. It was only when the Barbadian childhood corresponded with the Grenadian or the Guianese childhood in important details of folk-lore, that the wider identification was arrived at. In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England.[112]

The novels written reflect West Indian community in a spontaneous way: but two West Indian writers have underlined the phenomenon. John Hearne's novels are set in the fictional island of "Cayuna", and George Lamming operates on the new republic of "San Cristobal." Each fictional island, is as it were, the West Indies.

It would take a great deal of patient work and linguistic expertise to demonstrate how the West Indian author's awareness of both the English reading public and West Indian readers has affected his choice of words and his grammatical devices. Part of the work will be a study of the manuscripts and early drafts of West Indian novels. But we do not have to look very far to see how the West Indian author's presence in Britain has affected the content of his fiction. In V. S. Naipaul's Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion (1963), as in Edgar Mittelholzer's The Weather in Middenshot (1952) the setting is English and all the characters are English. No other West Indian novelist writing in Britain has followed these models. Most novels by West Indians are still set in the West Indies. As in Michael Anthony's The Year in San Fernando (1965) however, it is often possible to feel a nostalgic impulse in the evocation of the native place. A few novels like Samuel Selvon's I Hear Thunder (1963) George Lamming's Of Age and Innocence (1958) and even earlier,

---

[112] The Pleasures of Exile, p.214.

H. G. de Lisser's Under the Sun (1937), deal with the return to the native place of a fictional character who has been abroad in England. Finally, there are a number of works in which the main concern is the experience of black characters in an English setting. The following belong to this group: George Lamming's The Emigrants (1954); Samuel Selvon's The Lonely Londoners (1956) part of Ways of Sunlight (1957) and The Housing Lark (1965); Andrew Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement (1960 O. R. Dathorne's Dumplings in the Soup (1963) and Alvin Bennet's Because They Know Not (n.d. 1959 or 1960). One other piece of prose E. R. Braithwaite's To Sir, With Love (1959) is usually associated with these works. It is to this best-selling item that I would like now to turn.

The temptation to regard Mr. E. R. Braithwaite's To Sir, With Love as a work of fiction has not been uniformly resisted. A recent bibliography issued by the library of the University of the West Indies lists it under "Prose Fiction", and it has been mentioned as if it were a novel in recent commentaries on West Indian writing. It would have been pedantic to point out this error of classification if it had merely been a deed committed in ignorance. But it is a classification towards which one may be strongly drawn in spite of obvious contrary sign-posts.

In Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement, Johnny Sobert is not Andrew Salkey, but an invented fictional hero who is exposed to certain tensions in a stress situation: the E. R. Braithwaite in To Sir, With Love on the other hand is not a fictional character but a self-portrait. Mr. Salkey is free to manipulate his character according to the demands of the fictional situation. Mr. Braithwaite is limited by the details of a specific set of experiences. While initial differences such as these do not necessarily preclude moments when autobiography, like fiction, may become the means of a profound discovering exploration, to bear them in mind is to understand why Mr. Braithwaite's account fails to achieve the alchemy.

At no point does To Sir, With Love reveal the imaginative quality or stylistic control which one associates with works of fiction:

"She waited until the first few opening bars of the beautiful evergreen "In the Still of the Night" floated over the room, then turned and walked towards me, invitation large in her clear eyes and secretly smiling lips. I moved to meet her and she walked into my arms, easily, confidently, as if she belonged there. There was no hesitation, no pause to synchronise our steps; the music and the magic of the moment took us and wove us together in smooth movement. I was aware of her, of her soft breathing, her firm roundness, and the rhythmic moving of her thighs. She was a woman, there was no doubt about it, and she invaded my mind and my body. The music ended, all too soon. We were locked together for a moment, then released." (p.186).

A passage like this could easily belong to a work of fiction, as a parody of of the panty-conscious romance of certain kinds of women's magazines. With such a controlling purpose, the cliches, the stock situation, the trivially activated words and the sentimental mood would be appropriately employed. But the episode is offered in all seriousness in To Sir, With Love as an evocation of a magic moment. Instead of evoking the magic moment it makes it absurd.

But if To Sir, With Love is autobiography with a pull towards the pulp industry, its subject matter, the experiences of a black man in London, provides the strong temptation to consider it a work of fiction like Selvon's Lonely Londoners and Ways of Sunlight, Lamming's The Emigrants and Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement. All these books are at least partly set in England, contain black characters and white characters, and in raising the fundamental problem of identity, play a part in a complex process of decolonisation. The story 'Brackley and the Bed' in Selvon's Ways of Sunlight is a comic approach to the exile situation. Invaded by Teena and deprived of his bed by the sharp-tongued virago, Brackley proposes marriage but finds his hopes of a decent rest dashed by Teena's announcement that Aunty has arrived from Tobago to share the one-room, one-bed apartment with them. Interpreted, the story illustrates the indifference of the Mother Country: there are no English characters, only a severe English winter. Teena and Brackley speak dialect and reproduce West Indian domestic life. Disconnection is also apparent in Lamming's The Emigrants where the sense of futility and frustration is intensified

and elaborated in long debates among characters. In Andrew Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement, the hero is pressed hard at front and rear to retain his sanity. To Sir, With Love promises at first to conform to this pattern. At a Mayfair office, a receptionist is surprised that a black man has come for an interview arranged for a Mr. Braithwaite:

> ... She reached for a large diary and consulted it as if to verify my statement, then she picked up the telephone and cupping her hand around the mouthpiece as if for greater privacy, spoke rapidly into it, watching me furtively the while. (To Sir, With Love, pp. 37-38)

The interview ends in a courteous dismissal:

> I felt drained of strength and thought; yet somehow I managed to leave that office, navigate the passage, life and corridor and walk out of the building...
> Now, as I walked sadly away, I consciously averted my eyes from the sight of my face reflected fleetingly in the large plate glass shop windows. Disappointment and resentment were a solid bitter lump inside me; I hurried into the nearest public lavatory and was violently sick.
> (To Sir, With Love, p.39)

The observation is adequate, the protest, though a little over-dramatic, is genuine, and if there is no irony, no self-satire to add complexity to the colonial wail, the gesture towards a need for re-appraisal and re-discovery of self is made:

> I realised at that moment that I was British, but evidently not a Briton... I would need to re-examine myself and my whole future in terms of this new appraisal. (To Sir, With Love, p.44)

But the new appraisal never takes place, and the need for it is quickly blotted out. The sudden shift can be illustrated by comparing the Mayfair office incident with the incident at the Poisson d'Or and its sequel at Gillian's flat (Chapter 18). The waiter had been studiously rude, Mr. Braithwaite as studiously unoffended. And Mr. Braithwaite makes his fiancee's indignation look undignified with a number of grotesque images - the rasping cry of a cough-ridden hag, the clawing violence of an ungainly bird and the shrill harangue of a fishwife. Indignation and anger have given way to an exasperating submissiveness.

The other books, however, negotiate a tough realistic way, sometimes with anger, sometimes with indignation but always with a nervous tentativeness. At their most optimistic they essay towards a difficult concept of West Indian-ness. The preaching in which they occasionally indulge rumbles out of the gutsiness and undertainties of individual dilemmas imaginatively presented. They are no easy conclusions. Mr. Salkey's hero is almost disintegrated. Mr. Braithwaite becomes a successful and integrated pedagogue garlanded with flowers.

Not only is To Sir, With Love not a work of fiction. It differs startingly in temper from those fictional works with which it has been indiscriminately associated.

But it has gone into several impressions in the United Kingdom. It is a best-selling paperback. Its success has given Mr. Braithwaite an overdraft on his second book. And the film rights have, appropriately, been purchased by Mr. Harry Belafonte (the "Island in the Sun" boy). The English reviewers were enthusiastic:

> This is the noblest, most moving, least sentimental account of life in a modern school and of a teacher's struggles with his pupils and with himself that I have come across. (The Observer)
>
> ... This moving book shines like a good deed in a platitudinous world. (Daily Telegraph)
>
> A book of hope... (New Commonwealth)
>
> The world needs all the Mr. Braithwaites it can find. (Sunday Times)

In the West Indies, the book has been described, among those mentioned above, as the only sane and reasoned statement. I want to examine and try to understand the general popularity of To Sir, With Love, but I want to do this within the framework of a discussion of it as autobiography.

The writer of autogiography tells about himself and his experiences. One of the technical problems involved is how to talk about oneself without making the "I" insistent and monotonous. The division into areas of "I" narrative, reconstructed incidents and reconstructed conversations, promises an attempt to avoid a monotone in Mr. Braithwiate's offering.

On his first day at school, the teacher faces a rowdy class. The lesson on weights and measures is noisily interrupted:

> I knew that I had to do something, anything, and quickly ... 'That's enough!' My voice was sharp and loud, cutting off their laughter. "I find it both interesting and encouraging to discover that you have a sense of humour, especially about something as simple and elementary as weights... You were amused at your inability to read simple passages in your own language..." I was being sarcastic, deliberately, incisively sarcastic. (p.59).

Quiet prevails after this little bit of oratory, and the lesson is resumed:

"They listened, and I kept them listening till the dinner bell rang."

Apart from the self-congratulatory jibe ("in your own language") there is nothing "sarcastic, deliberately, incisively sarcastic" in this speech. The "I" narrator is over-satisfied with his own performance and this self-satisfaction clearly asserts itself in the triumphant "I kept them listening" which closes the chapter. This is not an isolated instance. For most of the book, Mr. Braithwaite's "I" narrative creates an impression of pompousness, complacency and self-satisfaction.

When the author resorts to dramatic reconstructions of incident, the avoidence of the "I" is only nominal. The incident in the gymnasium, involving Mr. Bell, the P.T. master, Buckley, Potter, and some other students is characteristic. When Bell bullies Buckley into an impossible athletic feat that ends in a painful crash, the fiery Potter snatches up a bit of furniture and advances on the teacher. The striking thing about this incident is the way in which it is put together to spell out Mr. Braithwaite's authority, persuasiveness and his near miraculous sympathetic control of the boys: the introductory sketch of Bell is intended to make us dislike him. The description of Buckley as amaible fat boy and class mascot not only marks him as potential victim but prepares us for the uncontrollable fire of Potter which is to be so dramatically contained. As a bit of machinery, Tich Johnson slips off to fetch the hero. As Potter advances on Bell, the stage is set for a dramatic entry:

...He snatched up the broken metal-bound leg and advanced on Bell, screaming:
'You bloody bastard, you f---ing bloody bastard.'
'Put that thing down, Potter, don't be a fool,' Bell spluttered, backing away from the hysterical boy.
'You made him do it; he didn't want to and you made him,' Potter yelled.
'Don't be a fool, Potter, put it down,' Bell appealed.
'I'll do you in, you bloody murderer.' Bell was big, but in his anger Potter seemed bigger, him improvised club a fearsome extension of his thick forearm.
That was where I rushed in....
'Hold it, Potter' I called.

(To Sir, With Love, p.155)

And Potter holds it.

The advantages of immediacy and spontaneity which are associated with dramatic reconstruction are sacrificed for a predictable self-aggrandisement.

The same motive vitiates Mr. Braithwaite's reconstructed conversations. The author discovers that Pamela Dare, the hottest number (of course) in his class has a crush on him. He must discuss this surprising thing with Grace Dale-Evans, one of his trouble shooters on the staff. Aunt Grace explains:

There hasn't been a really good man-teacher in this school for ages...
Then comes along Mr. Rick Braithwaite. His clothes are well cut, pressed and neat; clean shoes, shaved, teeth sparkling, tie and handkerchief matching as if he'd stepped out of a ruddy bandbox. He's big and broad and handsome. Good God, man, what the hell else did you expect? ...
I Got up and moved towards the door. I had been given more than I had asked for, and I felt humble and grateful. (To Sir, With Love, p.112)

Beside this kind of humility, Cassius Clay and Beowulf are self-effacing.

In Cicely Howland's The Long Run (1961) the author uses "I" narrative, reconstructed incidents and reconstructed conversations, but self-satisfaction and complacency are noticeably rare. She is involved in a revisionary process, a self-communing that calls for an honest and burning self-exposure. She is not afraid to describe her moments of pain and despair. "I knew I must be prepared to lean far out over the deep, to look not only at my own reflected image but to plunge in and touch bedrock below."

Mr. Braithwaite, in his autobiographical account scrupulously avoids pain and despair and unpleasantness. The 18 months of difficulties in job-hunting are given

a disproportionately small space in the book. Mr. Weston, who is inclined to make a few weak colour jokes, is attacked by the rest of the staff and done down by the author. Occasional instances of colour prejudice are used as opportunities to show off a massive detachment and grand forgivingness. Crucially, Mr. Braithwaite's failure to reveal the nervous effort involved in his victory over the tough pupils gives to the centre of his account a creaminess which marks it off as less the outcome of resourcefulness and obstinacy than of wishful thinking.

Cicely Howland's spiritual struggle is an act of self-discovery, Mr. Braithwaite's account is an act of self-display. It is only superficially that the writing of autobiography is troubled by questions of technique. The real problem is a problem of purpose.

And it is when we come to the question of purpose, seen from the other end, as function, that we can understand the popularity of <u>To Sir, With Love</u>. Behind the popular acclaim, there is a force akin to myth. There are important reservations to be made both at home and abroad, but in general we might say: for one group of readers, belief in the success, integration and acceptance of a black man by the white community ministers to self-respect and diminishes the need to search consciences. For another group, a mythical success and acceptance is a comfortably flabby escape from uncertainty, from the need of the derelict West Indian to discover and create the West Indian personality. Because it fosters complacency and self-deception, and because it stands in the way of self-discovery, the myth of <u>To Sir, With Love</u> is, for readers at home and abroad, a destructive myth.

But having gone this far, I want to approach from another angle and try to extract from this Caribbean Uncle Tom some of the bite that its placid surface conceals.

The outline of the story, a black man from the Guiana bush coming to the British metropolis to bring light to the savage benighted East End children may be

seen as a pointed reversal of the missionary situation. This carries its own venom. When Mrs. Pegg refuses to accept Mr. Braithwaite as a lodger, Barbara Pegg, a pupil, forces her mother to apologise. Mr. Braithwaite is very forgiving. But as a relieved Barbara Pegg turns away, Mr. Braithwaite reflects: "She was a good kid, and perhaps would, in due course, be able to teach her mother a few more lessons in the essential humanities." A comment like this changes a full toss into a beamer, and in this light Mr. Braithwaite's concentration on the school can be seen as a sly reflection on the adult population. An escape into the protective school, and success, is an indirect way of commenting upon the terror of race and colour prejudice outside.

Further, whenever there is an instant of prejudice against Mr. Braithwaite, somebody always sticks up for him. In the staff-room, the rest of the staff gun down Mr. Weston. On the train, Pamela Dare sharply rebukes two nasty old ladies who were muttering about "shameless young girls and these black men". At the Poisson d'Or Restaurant, it is Gillian who becomes indignant at the waiter's rudeness. It is remotely possible that concealed behind the massive detachment the author could be saying to the community in which he finds himself, "This isn't my problem at all. It is yours to solve among yourselves."

Finally, it is tempting to construe the sudden shift from a discontented, angry black in chapters 3 and 4 to a submissive, conciliating figure in the rest of the book as a deliberate manufacture, according to specifications. "You wanted a good black. Here it is. <u>To Sah, With Love</u>."

But if <u>To Sir, With Love</u> is such a tongue-in-cheek performance, its significance as literature or autobiography is not enhanced. For it would be the tongue-in-cheek not of irony, but of hypocrisy. While we cannot accuse Mr. Braithwaite of anything as lucid as a straight drive, we might console ourselves by recording that his defensive push has produced a boundary over the head of first slip.

But we must turn away from the effects of exile upon West Indian writers and writing. Higher labour costs, greater individual spending power and the existence of a vast network of institutions purchasing automatically have put the price of a novel manufactured in Britain beyond the means of most West Indians. This aggravates a situation described by George Lamming: "This was the kind of atmosphere in which all of us grew up. On the one hand a mass of people who were either illiterate or if not, had no connection whatever to literature since they were too poor or too tired to read; and on the other hand a colonial middle class educated it seemed, for the specific purpose of sneering at anything which grew or was made on native soil."[113] West Indian writers have deplored the poverty of cultural life in the islands: "Again and again one comes back to the main, degrading fact of the colonial society; it never required efficiency, it never required quality, and these things, because unrequired, became undesirable."[114] But the departure of so many gifted men from an area whose joint population hardly exceeds three million has worsened the plight of these islanders who cannot escape. On the eve of his departure for England, Roger Mais discussed his attitude to Jamaica: "Her sunsets and her burnished hills ... yes, her soil-eroded, scarred-red hills... yes, I shall remember these with pangs of homesickness. ... But if I should know regret it would be a betrayal and a denial of those values ... that have only met with sneering and contempt in this country of my birth." A phrase in the same article may be used to describe the situation today: "...[T]he Philistines are encamped here."[115]

West Indian novels deal with political and social issues of immediate relevance to the West Indian but these works are not read in the islands. The West Indian artist in exile may chafe at having to produce a fiction which is becoming

---

[113] George Lamming The Pleasure of Exile (1960) p.40

[114] V. S. Naipaul The Middle Passage (1962) p.58

[115] Roger Mais 'Why I Love and Leave Jamaica' (1950) reprinted in Public Opinion, Kingston, Jamaica, June 10, 1962.

increasingly disconnected from life, while the island-dwellers, no less than their predecessors on the land, are bounded on all sides by a life without fiction.

APPROACHES

In the last chapter I was concerned with the poverty of cultural and literary life in the islands. The next three chapters are generated by the suggestion that the absence of a native West Indian critical tradition has given primary or trend-setting significance to foreign criticism of West Indian novels. One one level this has shown itself in a certain West Indian ambivalence to the British reputation of V. S. Naipaul. But it is at three broader approaches to West Indian writing, concerned more with synthesis than with close analysis of separate works or individual authors that I want to look here. The three approaches are conveniently represented by some recent publications.

In A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature[1] a German scholar sees West Indian literature as a branch of modern African literature in European languages. The second school is represented by an American publication Terranglia[2] in which the use of English is taken as the ground for inventing a category called World Literature. The third attempt at synthesis is adequately suggested by the titles of another American publication The Commonwealth Pen,[3] and a later British offering, Commonwealth Literature.[4]

The common weakness of these approaches is that in varying degrees, they lose sight of particular qualities and elements in each of the literatures they embrace. Their interest for West Indian literature is that they touch upon questions of Race, Language and the Colonial connection. They thus provide convenient points of entry for discussing these three backgrounds to West Indian writing. I shall take each in turn in the next three chapters.

---

[1]Jahnheinz Jahn A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature, 1965

[2]Joseph Jones Terranglia (Twayne Publications Inc. N.Y.) 1965

[3]A. L. McLeod (ed.) The Commenwealth Pen (Cornell Univ. Press, N.Y.) 1961

[4]John Press (ed.) Commonwealth Literature 1965

CHAPTER III

Race

At the beginning of The History of the Caribby Islands (1666) translated from the French by John Davies, the author writes: "In the first place we shall speak of the inhabitants thereof who are strangers or Europeans yet only so far as the prosecution of our design requires; which having dispatched we shall descend to a more large and particular consideration of the Indians, [the Amerindians] the natural and originary inhabitants of the country ...". The European invasion led to the virtual eliminating of the "natural and originary" inhabitants of the West Indies. The small communities which have survived in Dominica and Guyana are marginal to the society.

This means that the West Indies is a society of immigrants. The elimination of the Amerindians was followed by the introduction of Africans as slaves. The abolition of slavery created labour problems that brought to the West Indies in the middle of the nineteenth century, small numbers of "poor Europeans" and Chinese, and then continuing up to 1915 or so, several waves of East Indian indentured labourers (especially to Trinidad and Guyana). The following table compiled from the Census figures for 1960 shows the present distribution of population in the four largest territories:

Territory	Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago	Guyana	Barbados	Group Totals
African	1,236,706	358,588	191,303	207,156	1,993,753
White	12,428	15,718	2,896	10,083	41,125
Indian	27,912	301,946	297,172	500	627,530
Chinese	10,267	8,361	4,015	-	22,643
Portuguese	included in other?	included in other?	6,984	-	6,984
Syrian	1,354	1,590	-	-	2,944
Mixed	271,520	134,749	73,137	13,993	493,399
Other	49,627	6,714	-	-	56,341
Total	1,609,814	827,957	603,135	232,327	3,244,719

The later groups of immigrants have had to adjust to the Negro-White cultural complex: tension in Trinidad between Negroes and Indians and civil war in Guyana in the last few years indicate that the Indians, the largest of the newer groups, and therefore the most difficult to be absorbed, are losing their immigrant status and seeking equal participation in the society.

At least three West Indian writers have tackled this process as an explicit theme in their novels. Ismith Khan's The Jumbie Bird (1961), set in the Trinidad of the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties has to do with conflicts over adjustment within the Indian community. Another writer of Indian descent - Sanuel Selvon, tackles this problem with more art, and on a broader front. A Brighter Sun (1952) begins with the Hindu wedding of the young Indian hero in the country. Selvon then places Tiger and his unseen bride in a new village called Barataria. The scene shifts next, to a Port of Spain slum near the Dry River where Joe's childhood, filled with floggings and rebellions, analogous to the slave past, is followed by concubinage with the more stable Negro woman. Selvon's 'typical Negro couple' are then brought to live as neighbours across the yard to the 'typical Indians'. As the novel runs its course the neighbours proceed from confrontation to integration and intimacy. The basic design carries over into Turn Again Tiger (1958) where Selvon brings the Chinese shop-keeper into the evolving nation. To describe A Brighter Sun in this way, however, is to bring to the forefront what is relatively unobtrusive in the work; Selvon's control of dialect, his anecdotal quality and his sensitive exploration of the process of growing up through Tiger's consciousness cover over the cultural fable to make A Brighter Sun an interesting and lively work of art.

The Negro novelist George Lamming is less optimistic about integration than Selvon. Of Age and Innocence (1958) operates on one level to show the tainted consciousness of the older generation of West Indians whose efforts to

form a united political front founder on racial distrust. Lamming's complex novel, however, has a layered structure. The urgent realism of the adult world is made to run parallel with the more dream-like quality of the boy's world, where the youngsters Rowley, Bob, Singh and Lee live their experimental lives. They are nevertheless, agents in Lamming's design, for the spontaneous multi-racial club they have formed is in ironic contrast to the adult political posturings of their parents. With a sense of the fragility of this integration - not so much because of its own weakness, but because of external influences from a more realistic world - Lamming allows the boys to describe their association as a secret society. It is part of this writer's lack of sentimentality that this fictive sub-world, having revealed the possible, is then catastrophically impinged upon through the machinations of the novel's more realistically portrayed elements.

Finally, one novel that throws light on Indian accommodation to West Indian society, but in an incidental way, is V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) Mr. Biswas' human struggle to define himself is chronicled against the background of the disintegration over three generations of a Hindu community. Throughout the novel, Naipaul satirises the sterility and outward forms of the Hindu traditions the Tulsis seek to retain in their new environment; and the novel's immediate conflict arises from Mr. Biswas' attempts to break out of this suffocating and impoverishing enclave.

But immigrant Indian adjustment to West Indian society, and Indian-Negro relationships are not explicit or prominent concerns in West Indian writing generally. Even less prominent is the appearance of the aboriginal Indian. In view however of the impressive[1] Indianist theme in Latin American writing in the nineteenth century, I would like to take an extended look at the fractional

---

[1]See G. R. Coulthard Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature (1962) pp. 6-26

interest shown by West Indian writers. My larger reasons for invoking nineteenth century Latin American literature will emerge at the end of the examination where they will serve as a lead into the overwhelming question of Africa and Africans in West Indian writing. More immediate ones are declared below.

The Aboriginal Indian in West Indian Fiction

The aboriginal Indian[2] seldom appears and is not a centre of social or political interest either in verse, in drama or in fiction by writers from the West Indies. It is useful, because of this, to record the cases in which the original West Indians make interesting appearances. For in doing so there will be an opportunity to make an uncomplicated comparison of the methods and purposes of six authors, five of whom are either "big names" or have made a significant contribution to the growth of prose fiction in the West Indies.

Two of the works to be looked at may be described as historical: they are H. G. deLisser's The Arawak Girl (1958), and Edgar Mittleholzer's Children of Kaywana (1952). In three others it is the contemporary Amerindian (as detribalised individual or in communities in the interior) who makes an appearance. The works in this group are Jan Carew's Black Midas (1958), a short story, At the Stelling (1960) by John Hearne, and another novel, Shadows in the Jungle (1961) by Christopher Nicole. In a less classifiable way, possibilities in the Amerindian presence - both contemporary and historical - have been realised in two novels Palace of the Peacock (1960) and Heartland (1964) by Wilson Harris.

The Arawak Girl[3] is historical in the sense that it is based upon a historical incident - Christopher Columbus' shipwreck near St. Ann's Bay in the north east of Jamaica in 1503 and his stay in the area for a year while awaiting

---

[2]In this section the word Indian will be used again but this time to include the different Amerindian tribes in Guyana and the Caribs and Arawaks who dominated the islands.

[3]Pioneer Press paperback, Kingston, Jamaica (1958).

help from Hispaniola. In covering this period the short novel also tries to suggest features in the domestic life and in the village organisation of Arawak Indians. The opening section where Anacanoa the heroine awakes her husband illustrates this impulse in the work:

> He woke with a bound, came down to earth, and stood beside her. They were still almost children, he fifteen, she a year younger; but they had reached adult state in their little Arawak Indian community and had now been married for about three months. This hut was theirs, he had built it with the aid of his wife's relatives. A frail structure, yet in a semi-conscious fashion he was proud of it. He was proud of himself too, for his girl-wife was the daughter of the village caciqueor chief, and it was admitted that she was the most beautiful girl to be found for miles around.
> (The Arawak Girl, p.9)

The traditional belief that the Caribs were fierce man-eaters while the Arawaks were peaceful is given an airing in the novel. Anacanoa is made to describe her origins as part Carib, and later, when she is trying to rally her people to resist the Spanish invader, one of the chiefs remembers: "'They say that long ago, Anacanoa, your mother's mother's mother's mother was a man-eater from Ayty,' remarked the chief with a glint of respect and admiration in his eyes. 'And you talk as she might have talked.'" (p.66). When the same chief suggests that the Arawak villages have no leader, Anacanoa's blood rises: "'I, the man-eating woman, will lead them' replied Anacanoa proudly" (p.66).

Anti-Spanish sentiment gave birth to, and was expressed in, literary Indianism in Latin American literature of the nineteenth century. Writing in the twentieth century, deLisser, a Jamaican in a British colony, had no such motivation. Nevertheless, he is so bound by the historical facts he wishes to write about that the novel is intermittently anti-Spanish. As the invaders' caravels approach, the Arawaks come to meet them with spears and shouts. Columbus is moderate:

> 'We must pacify, not antagonise, these savages; by pacific methods we shall bring them to do whatever we wish.'
> 'But if they attack us Admiral?' demanded one fellow, glancing from the deck of the Nina down to where the Indians in the canoes were brandishing their spears.

'That is another matter; then indeed we shall have to teach them a lesson they will not speedily forget. But remember, we are Christians, and we are here, among other things, the spread the doctrine of Holy Church. We must forgive our enemies.' At the moment it did not occur to Don Christopher that he and his were really the enemy and that the people of the island could have no need of forgiveness from them. But then the Admiral already looked upon the Indians as his King's subjects and therefore necessarily obedient to the governance of himself as His Majesty's Viceroy in these parts. (The Arawak Girl, p.16)

The authorial intrusion adds to the laboriousness of what is already, a heavy-handed dialogue on a dead issue. In a later crisis in his heroine's life, deLisser is in better control as an artist, describing the result of Spanish brutality through Anacanoa's consciousness, and as part of her development towards nationalism and leadership:

She stared at her people swimming and struggling in the water. She had never thought of them as her people before; they were from another part of the island, strangers, foreigners, to her. But now she had a sense of oneness with them; a feeling that had been growing within her all these weeks came fully to life at last. She and they were one, and these brutal pale-faced men were of another breed altogether.
(The Arawak Girl, p.62)

There is another side to The Arawak Girl. As in deLisser's other historical novels (and indeed in the British historical novel in the 19th century) there is a strong romance element. Anacanoa selects and woos Diego Mendez, one of the strangers. At their first embrace, she "clung to Diego warmly, nestling against him; now she fancied, she knew why as a girl, she had looked so yearningly at the fair strangers who had so suddenly appeared one day before her village when she had just been married; she had wanted one of them, the handsomest, the best, and he had come at last" (p.29). The lovers are separated by fate - Diego, the brave, is sent away on an aid-seeking mission. Although Anacanoa becomes the fierce leader of her people against the Spaniards, a portrait of Diego brings about a rapprochement between the aging Discoverer and the love-lorn Arawak girl. In the battle between Columbus' loyalists and the rebels under Francisco Porras, Anacanoa is mortally wounded. As she dies there is a

final message: "Tell my father to look after my little child and remind Diego of her. I wonder ..." The romantic novelist's match-making instinct completes the happy thought at the end of the novel, when Diego, whose nephew, also called Diego, is about to leave Spain for Jamaica, asks his namesake to seek out the girl whose mother had been Anacanoa:

> 'Tell her I knew and loved her mother,' said the older Diego. He looked at his nephew thoughfully.
> 'I wonder ...' were the words that passed through his mind.
> (The Arawak Girl, p.91)

I have picked out certain elements in The Arawak Girl to suggest how mechanically the novel has been put together: there is no sustaining interest on the level of character; nor is there any impulse to explore possibilities that might have been latent in the historical situation.

There is an element of the formula too in deLisser's handling of the Arawaks, both as a people, and in the case of the individual, Anacanoa. In the early pages there is a picture of integrated natures in a happy land: "They had no word for all this beauty, yet they enjoyed it as part of their lives; the vivid green and the grandeur of the mountains that formed the background of their home they looked at daily as something which had always been and would always be there: these too, had become a part and parcel of their existence which they would not willingly do without. Life was easy for them on the whole ..." (p.11). A few moments of primitivism are indulged in through Diego's consciousness: he was "accustomed by now to the primitive freedom of the Arawaks" and he "saw nothing to blame in her simple directness of speech and purpose. Somehow it fitted in with the surroundings of these strange people" (p.29).

But this is only a passing phase in The Arawak Girl. There is nothing in deLisser's novel, or in the works of any West Indian writer, like Mrs. Aphra Behn's account of natural Indians in The History of the Royal Slave:

> And these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous mistress. ... They have a native justice which knows no fraud; and they understand no vice or cunning but when they are taught by white man. ...
>
> ...
>
> They do not only in the woods, and over the Sevana's, in hunting, supply the parts of hounds, by swiftly scouring through these almost impassable places and by the mere activity of their feet, run down the nimblest deer, and other eatable beasts; but in the water, one would think they were gods of the rivers or fellow-citizens of the deep; so rare an art they have in swimming, diving and almost living in water; by which they command the less swift inhabitants of the floods. And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their hands, they do with arrows; and have so admirable an aim, that they will split almost a hair, and at any distance that an arrow can reach: they will shoot down oranges, and other fruit, and only touch the stalk with the dart's point, that they may not hurt the fruit.[4]

No West Indian writer has idealised the Indians as happy primitives or depicted the land in which they flourished as another Eden. Once having made the outsider's gesture, deLisser proceeds to portray the Indians in action as simple, superstitious and cowardly. They are defeatists who fail to respond to Anacanoa's courageous leadership.

In contrast to her people, Anacanoa the heroine is an exceptional aborigine. Physically, she has retained "a slightness and physique rare in the Arawak woman" and "her supple flanks and body showed none of that soft flabbiness so common among the Indian women of more than twenty years of age" (p.24). In Mittelholzer's Children of Kaywana, the heroine feels a great sadness at the age of twenty-four because she feels herself less attractive to her Dutch keeper. She is made to reflect: "It was the Indian in her. Indian women faded quickly. After twenty-two men no longer looked at them with desire" (p.30). deLisser's exceptional heroine does not age in this way. Her physique however is not all:

> Something in her mind had impressed itself upon her face and figure, for thought moulds flesh, and the spirit manifests itself in walk and carriage and facial aspect. She had always thought of herself as a chief's

---

[4]From pages 3, 4 and 5 of The Novels of Mrs. Aphra Behn intr. Ernest A. Baker [1905]

daughter, his eldest, his favourite and that increased the pride and self-regard with which she had been born. She thought highly of herself, was, in a way, a great lady in a village community essentially democratic. The other girls and women looked mean beside her. (The Arawak Girl, p.24)

British anti-slavery writers of the eighteenth century had evolved a tradition of the Noble Negro beside whom all other Negroes were ignoble. It was not to deLisser's purpose to use this tradition in his novels of slavery. Anacanoa's emphatic superiotity over her people, however, represents a translation of this convention into Indian terms. But there is another way of looking at the status of Anacanoa. In The White Witch of Rosehall (1929) and Psyche (1952) deLisser's predilection for the impressive female character had led to the creation of Negro women who stood out from the mass. They are, however, exceptional in limited, usually exotic ways, and they are neither heroines nor central figures in the works in which they appear. In his historical novels of slavery, deLisser chose to accept the factual limits of his situations, thus practising an art of fiction which restricted its own right to invent or discover possibilities. In The Arawak Girl, the remoteness of the Indian events and their disconnection from the social and political pressures of the author's time seem to have been influential in encouraging deLisser to break from a fiction of the facts, as he knew them, and invent a complete heroine from among the Indians. But it is precisely because deLisser does not have an obvious social or political theme to prop up his failings as a creative writer that he slips into an easy formula, portraying Anacanoa in terms based upon European concepts of physcial beauty and of the 'natural' nobility of the descendants of kings.

The pattern of exceptional heroine and superstitious mass is also to be found in Edgar Mittelholzer's treatment of the Indians. Children of Kaywana (1952), is the first part of a trilogy: the other parts are Kaywana Stock (1954) and Kaywana Blood (1958) in which the history of Guyana is traced from the days

of the Dutch trading settlements in the seventeenth century, to agitation for independence in British Guiana in 1953.

Within the documentary framework, Mittelholzer explores theories of heredity, perpetrates an extended joke on miscegenation, and gives expression to an interest in the psychology of sex and power. Kaywana and the Indians appear only in the first section of Children of Kaywana. The presentation is guided less by a desire to portray the life of the Indians than by the author's ironic determination to establish Kaywana as a van Groenwegel ancestral figure: Kaywana's fierce spirit, her directness and her courage, are appropriated as the essential qualities of all "true van Groenwegels."

The mass of Indians appear as in The Arawak Girl. They are simple, superstitious and cowardly. Kaywana differs from them firstly in that she is half-English. She scorns the magic of the tribe and is possessed of an unusual spirit. These points are stated, as it were, in a conversation with her first lover August Vyfius:

> 'When months pass I will have a child and I will name it August if it is a boy.'
> 'Your piaiman - that fellow Wakkatai - what will he have to say?'
> 'He will be offended, but I don't care. I'm half English sailor. His magic can't hurt me. I'm not afraid. I fear no one.'
> 'Yes, you have spirit. From the first day I saw you I knew you were an unusual person. A jet of fire.'
> She smiled. 'I like that. A jet of fire.'
>
> (Children of Kaywana, p.14)

We have been told. But Kaywana's difference from the tribe is conveyed through her running antipathy to Wakkatai - rejected suitor (Kaywana spits in his face); ineffective medicine-man, and spoilt-child (the Dutchman, van Groenwegel flatters him and presents him with a brass ring pretending that it is solid gold, in the presence of a sneering Kaywana); and as leader of a bunch of savages in the attack upon Kaywana's home. In this crucial episode, Kaywana's rejection

of Wakkatai and the tribe is symbolised in her fierce defence of her van Groenwegel children, and in Wakkatai's inability to possess her sexually:

> Willem and Aert, their muskets pivoting round indecisively on the tableage, watched the struggle between their mother and Wakkatai. Kaywana bled from her nose and from her mouth. The moonlight kept flashing on and off her face. Wakkatai was trying to rape her, but finding himself too weak. She was too furious an animal for him. He grappled with her in vain. She threw him off, pounded his face with her fists, snarled and spat blood and spittle into his face. (Children of Kaywana, p.55)

Eventually, Willem shoots Wakkatai and Kaywana does the rest with the butt of a musket. It is this incident which makes Kaywana immortal in the van Groenwegel family myth.

Mittelholzer and deLisser have different purposes, but both, looking back at the Indians in a historical or pseudo-historical way, see them as simple, superstitious savages. The glorious pre-Columban past remains out of focus. When the writers come to invent their exceptional heroines, the same qualities - strong emotion, directness, courage and ferocity - are selected. Mittelholzer's limited portrayal of the Indians serves the function for which it is introduced into the novel, but it is still a fair description of the terms used, to say that although both writers avoid Mrs. Behn's idealising tendency they do not escape a hackneyed view both of the mass and of individuals.

The three works in which the contemporary Indian appears are all set in Guyana, where the Indians in fact exist as marginal communities or as detribalised individuals. Christopher Nicole's Shadows in the Jungle (1961), is like the historical works looked at above in that it makes a gesture towards representing the tribe. They are seen from the outside as primitives, and information about their village organisation and their customs, builds up to a bacchanalian piwarri-drinking orgy that acts as an exotic background for a savage mutilation. There are no exceptional Indians, but there are half-castes whose qualities are spectacular, if unoriginal. Dawson, the white Assistant Superintendent of

Police, who has ventured to the interior to raid an illicit rum still finds himself falling in love with Molly Burns, daughter of the white man David Burn, and Medora, sister of Tiparu the Accawoio headman: "He realised that he was being trapped by the same half-caste qualities which had trapped Anne Wheaton; the entrancing mixture of Indian and European; the cotton dress and the European style underclothes of yesterday against the queye beneath the thin shirt this morning; the quiet polite school-marm of Bowen's office and the frightened, angry animal of Burnstown" (p.129). Shadows in the Jungle is full of rousing stuff aimed at a certain kind of reader: there is little point in making an easy critical target of it.

But it is interesting to look for a while at the possibilities Nicole realises in an Amerindian custom which is given a marked prominence in the novel, for the same custom seems to have stimulated a short story by another Guyana-born writer, Wilson Harris. The epigraph to Shadows in the Jungle reads: "He who kills, he also must be killed; this is the law of the Kanaima." On page 37, Dawson the European poses a view of Kanaima as crime, against Molly's Indian view of it as law:

> 'Case? Kanaima is not a crime, Mr. Dawson. It is a law like any made by the white man.'
> 'It is a blood feud, Miss Burn. A relic of the past when there were no laws.'
> 'Not a feud, sir. A duty. A family responsibility which affects only the nearest relative of the dead man, and the murderer. It is more sure than your law, and cannot be alleviated by senseless appeals to mercy.'
> 'Is mercy senseless?' he asked quickly. 'I'm sorry. I'm trained to regard the Kanaima as a crime, and the avenger as just as much a murderer as his victim.'

This may suggest to the reader that the novelist is setting up a moral debate to be argued out in fictional terms either by witnessing characters or, less obtrusively, in the consciousness of some half-caste Hamlet. But when Molly's brother Allen, kills his uncle Simon, the crazy brother of Tiparu, the fictional possibilities in the Kanaima situation turn in another direction.

Tiparu, who has so far been seen from the outside, becomes the avenger. Even if a switch to his consciousness could be smoothly and convincingly effected, Tiparu, a full Indian, could hardly, in Nicole's terms, be expected to suffer any kind of doubt about carrying out his duty. This leaves the author with the possibility of investing in the tortured consciousness of the murderer who is expecting his doom.

What Nicole actually resorts to, is superficial and disappointing in view of his fascination with the Kanaima. Allen Burns, besieged in the house, is presented without subtlety or conscience as a man facing desperate alternatives: "I going either walk to Bura-Bura and the goldfields and the police going catch hold of me, or I going walk into the bush, and Tiparu going catch hold of me for sure" (p.171). Finally he makes a break for safety, and dies a swift but merciless death at the hands of the savage Tiparu. In its own way this finale is thrillingly rendered:

> The trees thinned, and he gasped into the open. He turned along the old roadway leading to the landing, and he stopped. Tiparu stood in front of him.[5] The chieftain was naked except for a loincloth. His chest and face were streaked with irregular patches of yellow paint, his legs were thickly coated with vermilion. He held a long slender bamboo tube in front of him, and a cutlass lay on the ground at his feet.
>
> Allen panted for breath. Tiparu waited for a few seconds, then slowly raised the blowpipe. He did not speak. Allen licked his lips. For a moment his mouth trembled then it hardened again. There was no sense in waiting. He stepped forward bending his body. Tiparu expelled his breath and the dart lodged in the boy's thigh.
>
> Allen stopped moving and looked down. He felt no pain, but his imagination told him that the deadly wourali poison which would paralyse his nervous system and strangle him as surely as any rope had already started to take effect. He sat down on the ground, took a deep breath, and screamed. Tiparu waited silently. He watched Allen open his mouth to scream again, gag, and half-choke. He watched the great muscles twitch uselessly as the boy tried to move. He watched the broad, hard face darken and the lips turn blue.
>
> Tiparu did not move until Allen slowly toppled on his face. Then the chieftain picked up his cutlass, and with three strokes cut off the lifeless head. (Shadows in the Jungle, p.215)

---

[5] My italics. These are elements in a stereotype. Nicole uses them well if predictably, to create suspense.

To recognise this skilfully written piece as the supreme moment in the novel is to confirm the suspicion that Nicole's interest in dealing with the Indians is purely sensational. The author's attitude to his fictional characters seems to be a straight reproduction of a real-life attitude to the marginal communities in his native country, so that the fiction, far from being a means of revealing the human and universal, serves only to consolidate a historically held prejudice.

I shall consider below Wilson Harris' handling of the Indians in two novels - Palace of the Peacock and Heartland. I wish, however, to glance now at his short story Kanaima[6] since the contrast with Nicole which suggests itself is illuminating. Instead of a revenge code, Harris invokes Kanaima "the avenging Amerindian god who could wear any shape he wished, man or bird or beast." Guilt, fear and flight occur in the story but these do not arise in connection with a murder. The literal foundation of the story is the migration of a tribe at a time of drought, famine and sickness. The persecuted are a band of Macusi Indians:

> Kanaima had been on their heels now for weeks and months. Their home and village - comprising about sixty persons - had been stricken. First there had been an unexpected drought. Then the game had run away in the forest and across the savannaha. After that, people had started dropping down dead. Kanaima planted his signature clear at last in the fire he lit no one knew when and where; it came suddenly running along the already withered spaces of the savannahs, leaving great black charred circles upon the bitten grass everywhere, and snaking into the village compound where it lifted its writhing self like a spiritual warning in the headman's presence before climbing up the air into space.

A social or historical view of the Indians can always ben glimpsed beneath the surface of the story, but Harris makes no attempt to exploit "Indianness". Hence, it matters not at all that the Indians are being superstitious. What is developed in the story is the universal validity of their sense of vulnerability and persecution. The Indians, indeed, are bewildered by the break-up of the known substance of their lives "It was as if the world they saw and knew was

---

[6]Collected in Black Orpheus ed. Ulli Beier (Longmans of Nigeria, 1964).

dying everywhere and no one could dream what would take its place." The Indians are recognised in the story as involuntary images of the condition of being in the world. This is not to say that the Indians are being used by Harris to write in a pessimistic or absurd vein about modern existential angst. The condition of the Indians is further transcendentalised by Harris, since we are made to see them as at the beginning of a long process of death and rebirth. The break-up in their lives is alchemised into gestation, and under Harris' visionary spell, flight begins to turn into quest.

Harris' Kanaima, therefore, occurs in a story of metaphysical proportions as a concrete expression of frailty, dereliction, insecurity and dread. The contrast with Nicole does not need to be drawn out.

Returning to Shadows in the Jungle, I wish to enumerate stereotyped or conventional attributes of the Indian which also occur in writings by Jan Carew and John Hearne. The Indians are described in a simile as forest creatures (page 90); they are said by David Burn to be silent (page 66); when Allen Burn is threatened by his sister, and becomes suddenly angry we hear of "the primitive violence of the Indian" (page 106); and another conventional aspect of the Indian, not directly related to those already listed appears in this work. Speaking about the bush rum enterprise, Allen Burn considers that his mother (Medora) and her brother, Tiparu, who are Indians do not approve: "They ain't got no use for money" (page 102).

These attributes are scattered in Shadows in the Jungle and Nicole does not attempt to compose any single character out of them. In Carew's Black Midas and in Hearne's At the Stelling, where there is no attempt to represent the Indians as a group, these attributes are applied to the de-tribalised Indian as a shaping racial heritage. Both Carew and Hearne ride the stereotypes artfully.

In Black Midas Pancho is a minor character whose function is to reveal to the reader the unnatural obsession of the hero with discovering gold. On the last ruthless expedition, before Shark, the hero, has his accident and punishment, Pancho becomes depressed in an ominous way, quarrels with Shark and then (conveniently for the novelist) vanishes mysteriously into the bush.

Attributes that appeared in isolation in Nicole's novel - the Indian as forest creature and the silent Indian - are brought together in a functional way by Carew. Pancho's depression is described by the narrator: "The long spells underground dampened Pancho's spirit, and night after night he had no laughter, no jokes, no hunting stories to fill the long silences. He was part Indian and part Negro. Both the Indian and the Negro were forest people but the former could match their moods to the brooding silence of a forest twilight ..." (p.276). Pancho's own voice adds to this: "Me carrying that dark inside me belly and me can't root it out." When Shark tries to console the Indian with the thought of gold, a third attribute is brought into relation with the two in the above passage. Pancho invokes his mother: "Me mama was an Indian woman and gold-fire never light in she eye nor in she people eye. If it wasn't for you, skipper, me would 'have lef' the gold just where it born in the earth belly. Me like me hunting and me fishing, me walking through the bush whole day ..." (p.277).

Because Pancho is a character with a specific function in the novel, and because, as a minor character, he is not exposed for too long, the stereotypes upon which he is built are not called in question by the reader. Carew's presentation of Pancho is by the accident of its brevity, not unsuccessful. The use of Indian attributes is at the centre of John Hearne's At the Stelling.[8] Hearne's technique in riding a potentially dangerous course is as brilliant as it seems effortless.

---

[7]Collected in West Indian Stories ed. Andrew Salkey (1960).

The story develops around the relationship between Cockburn, the new leader of a survey party in the Guyanese interior, and John, the gang foreman. Cockburn is "a tall high mulatto man, young and full in body with eyes not blue and not green but coloured like the glass of a beer bottle." John is part Amerindian, part Carib.. It is possible to recognise Cockburn as the neurotic mulatto, but Hearne just avoids depending upon the cliche by shadowing the relationship between Cockburn and John with the one that had existed between Hamilton the previous leader (a European Creole) and John:

> You see, John and Mister Hamilton was like one thing except that Mister Hamilton have schooling and come from a big family in Zuyder Town. But they each suck from a Carib woman and from the first both their spirit take. When we have Mister Hamilton as boss, whatever John say do as if it was Mister Hamilton say it, and at night when Mister Hamilton lie off in the big Berbice chair on the veranda and him and John talk it sound like one mind with two tongue. That's how it sound to the rest of we when we sit down the steps and listen to them talk.

This adds to Cockburn's insecurity, and to his uncertainty as leader. He determines to reduce John "to show that gang foreman is only gang foreman and that boss is always boss." A series of petty deprivations follows, culminating in Cockburn's confiscation of John's game on the ground that it was "shot with government ammunition." In the climax John goes berserk and shoots Cockburn and seven others in the party. The return of Hamilton at the end "sets a different tone to the whole affair which would never have happened if Cockburn who has been shot dead, had been equipped to lead the survey party in the way Hamilton was and still is."

It is a proper enough response to see the story as a moral exercise in "the relationship between master and servant, the officer-in-command and the man he commands, the necessity for proportion and responsibility."[8] Not every reader will agree, however, with Wilson Harris' strictures on At the Stelling, though the critique throws light on the kind of fiction Harris himself writes. Within

---

[8] Wilson Harris Tradition and the West Indian Novel, a lecture published by the London West Indian Students Union (1964).

its tradition, Hearne's story is finely constructed. That such racially touchy material should be given a moral patterning, and that the moral should exist on a level totally removed from the racial stereotypes out of which Hearne builds, seem to me to be a remarkable achievement.

In the discussion that follows my main interest is in analysing how the Indian stereotypes are turned to account in the fiction. Inevitably, this involves appreciating At the Stelling as what it is, not what it might have been in another conception.

The story is narrated in the words of Dunnie, a character who witnesses the action. Through Dunnie, Hearne makes use of the "silent Indian" stereotype in creating the sense of impending violence that paces the narrative. But this "silent Indian" only becomes the brooding John, full of menace, because Hearne insinuates early in the narrative a premonition of disastrous conflict between John and his boss; Son-Son ("Trouble der soon") and Dunnie ("Trouble is to come between John and Mister Cockburn") give this premonition a choric frequency in the story, and it is in this light that each of John's silent reactions to events involving himself and Cockburn seems to mark a stage towards an inevitable catastrophe.

Thus, when Cockburn misses a deer and makes a weak and arrogant excuse: "John don't answer but only nod once, and Mister Cockburn turn and walk on, and I know say that if I could see John's face it would be all Carib buck. Sometimes you can see where the Indian lap with it, but other times is all Indian and closed like a prison gate; and I knew say, too, that it was this face Mister Cockburn did just see." Later, when Cockburn makes fun of John in a malicious way "John say nothing"; the narrator going on to describe John washing himself "like an Indian." All the way down-river to the town, New Zuyder, where he is to purchase his own rifle, since Cockburn has forbidden him free use of government

supplies, "John don't say a word. Him sit in the boat and stare down the black water as if it is a book giving him secret to remember." John's brooding silence is part of a threatening immobility that lends suspense to the story. Cockburn confiscates John's game because it had been shot with stolen ammunition and "John stay as still as if him was dead." And just before the Indian goes berserk, Dunnie's attempt to preserve peace is met with a loaded silence: "John look at me and it is one black Indian Carib face stare like statue into mine. All of him still, except the hands that hold the new rifle, and polish, polish, polish with a rag until the barrel shine blue like a Chinee whore hair."

In the quotations given, Dunnie, as narrator, is made to record John's behaviour "objectively"; as spectator he then uses stereotypes in expressing his awe at the situation that is building up around John and Cockburn. There is, thus, a regular movement from presented particulars to stereotyped generalisation. The pattern is crucial. For it means that the stereotypes are being deployed to reinforce our sense of character and situation already presented in other terms. To put it negatively is to measure the full proportion of Hearne's technical triumph here: character and situation are not set out as illustrations that consolidate a stereotyped view.

John's instinct for the bush, his accuracy with the rifle, and his prowess as a hunter are presented in action. These three "Indian attributes" occur as early as in Mrs. Behn's Oroonoko but they are subtilised and elaborated in At the Stelling. Cockburn, in anger at John's flight to the bush, uses one of the attributes in terms of abuse: "You can take an Indian out of the bush, but God Almighty himself can't take the bush out of the Indian." John is not only as accurate as Mrs. Behn's Indians who "will shoot down oranges and other fruit and only touch the stalk with the dart's point", he has a mystical-love relationship with the rifle: "Only we know how John need to hold that rifle. [Forbidden by

Cockburn/ When it came to rifle and gun him is all Indian, no African in it at all. Rifle to him is like woman to we. Him don't really hold a rifle, him make love with it." Finally, when John, having stolen seven cartridges from Cockburn, returns from his hunting expedition he exults in his own expertise: "Him is seated on the stelling and all you can see of him face is the teeth as him grin and the cheeks swell up and shiny with pleasure. Lay out on the stelling before him is seven piece of game. Three deer, a labba and three bush pig. None of we ever see John look so. Him tired till him thin and grey but happy and proud till him can't speak."

These three slightly modified "Indian attributes" are not only presented externally, in action. They are given an inner potency as compulsive laws of John's nature. When he is deprived of the use of the Government rifle, and later, of cartridges, his resentment and longing are those of a man denied self-expression. And when he hears the call of the bush and the hunt, he is driven to steal from a man whose hostility has already shown itself. The fulfilment John feels on returning from the hunting expedition is inward and satisfying and above the distinctions being erected by Cockburn, hence his inspired manner: "'Mister Cockburn,' John say, so crazy proud that even now him want to like the man and share pride with him. (I did take the rounds, sir. From your room. Seven shot I take Mister Cockburn and look what I bring you back. Take that deer, sir, for yourself and your family. Town people never taste meat like than.'" Cockburn is unable to respond to this exaltation.

The outlines of the stereotypes are discernible but they have been buried in John's individual nature. Hearne transforms the "Indian attributes" in yet another way. They are given social significance as compensating for social deprivation: "Here in the bush him is a king, but in New Zuyder him is just another half-buck without a job." More fundamentally, they are bound up with John's respect for

himself as a man. The confiscation of John's game by Cockburn is the final blundering act by which irreparable injury is done.

> John stay still as if him was dead. Only when we gather up the game and a kid deer drop one splash of dark stomach blood onto the boards him draw one long breath and shiver ..... None of we could forget John's face when we pick up him game. For we Negro, and for the white man, and for the mulatto man, game is to eat sometimes, or it is play to shoot. But for the Indian, oh God, game that him kill true is life everlasting. It is manhood.

In this passage "the silent Indian" has disappeared behind the menacing John. And the narrator's literal and predictable explanation of John's attitude in "Indian" terms ends with a declaration "It is manhood" that, ironically, truly describes a complex psychological moment. Thus daringly does Hearne extract his point from the jaws of the stereotype.

At the Stelling, is essentially, a study of incompatibility between two men, to which Hearne gives a moral shape. More purely a craftsman than any of the writers so far considered, Hearne is able to make maximum use of the stereotypes without allowing his story to be controlled by them. But the achievement remains largely a triumph of technique. In Wilson Harris' handling of the Indian, we have to come to terms not simply with technique, but with a revolutionary conception in which the obscure and marginal Indian is given a living currency.

Harris' criticism that Hearne, in At the Stelling, has "turned away from the real moral depth and challenge of his material" is a useful hint with which to approach the Guyanese novelist's presentation of the Indians in Palace of the Peacock[9] and in Heartland[10]. None of the stereotypes of the Indians, either as a group or as individuals appear in these novels. Like deLisser and Mittelholzer, Harris selects an Amerindian woman, but he does not invest in her as heroine or as exceptional creature set apart from a fading or decadent race. And whereas deLisser and Mittelholzer deal in the historical conflict between

---

9Published in 1960
10Published in 1964

European invader and aboriginal invaded, Harris explores a ground of extraordinary unity between them. This is a characteristic of all Harris' fiction: whatever the raw material, there is always a natural pressure to express a vision of the unity of man within and across nation and race, and in Time. When characters in the conventional novel are depicted as autonomous individuals in a social or historical context, the universal is discovered in the human qualities they have, or in the transferability of the situations in which they find themselves. Sometimes, and especially when one reads the literature of other countries, it is the reader who makes essential recognitions. In Harris' fiction, non-recognition is made impossible. The characters have a continuity of being through past, present and dream-future; and the notion of the autonomous individual is disconcertingly worn down as single characters crumble into one another or into things. So in Palace of the Peacock, on the journey up-river towards the mission of Mariella (place, person, or dream) the crew headed by Donne is a confused assembly of the living, the dead and the dreaming. At times, characters experience a shock of recognition as when the narrator, having noticed that "Wishrop resembled Donne", feels "my heart come into my mouth with a sense of recognition and fear. Apart from this fleeting wishful resemblance it suddenly seemed to me I had never known Donne in the past - his face was a dead blank. I saw him now for the first faceless time as the captain and unnatural soul of heaven's dream; he was myself standing outside of me while I stood inside of him" (p.23). The recognisable basis of the journey up-river is the European pursuit of gold and the Indians in the sixteenth century, but it soon begins to dawn upon the reader that this journey has been going on for centuries, involving different peoples and different material ambitions. The fictional crew is cosmopolitan, and includes a pair of twins as well as a father and his son of what is, possibly, an incestuous union:

> Cameron's great-grandfather had been a dour Scot, and his great-grandmother an African slave and mistress. Cameron was related to Schomburgh (whom he addressed as Uncle with the other members of the crew) and it was well-known that Schomburgh's great-grandfather had come from Germany, and his great-grandmother was an Arawak American Indian. The whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were. They were all knotted and bound together in the enormous bruised head of Cameron's ancestry and nature as in the white unshaven head of Schomburgh's age and presence. (Palace of the Peacock, p.40)

The crew express the unity of man: this revisionary journey lays bare the essential spiritual meaning of the individual quests which, in a material world, had been expressed in materialistic terms.

Harris' treatment of the Arawak woman in Palace of the Peacock partakes of a vision of unity and transcendence, but the whole is given credible fictional form. It is the continuity of art and vision in his work which makes Harris the most important West Indian novelist, and one of the most important practitioners of the art of fiction in English.

On the literal level, the invaders have come upon the Indian village and the villagers have taken to flight. Donne and one of the daSilva twins, find an old woman knocking about in the deserted village, and force her to accompany the crew in pursuit of her people beyond Mariella (This turns out to be the crucial spiritual leg of the journey) The old woman shows no antagonism towards the invading foreigners, but wears the expression of one who has shed all physical anxiety:

> We had in our midst a new member sitting crumpled-looking like a curious ball, old and wrinkled. Her long black hair - with the faintest glimmer of silvery grey - hung in two plaits down to her waist. She sat still as a bowing statue, the stillness and surrender of the American Indian of Guyana in reflective pose. Her small eyes winked and blinked a little. It was an emotionless face. The stiff brooding materiality and expression of youth had vanished, and now - in old age - there remained no sign of former feeling. There was almost an air of crumpled pointlessness in her expression, the air of wisdom that a millenium was past, a long timeless journey was finished without appearing to have begun, and no show of malice, enmity and overt desire to overcome oppression and evil mattered any longer. (Palace and the Peacock, p.71)

In the 'historical' fictions discussed, the Indians "belonged to a race that neither forgave nor forgot" but in Palace of the Peacock the Arawak woman has achieved a Byzantine detachment, a miracle of spiritual triumph over the world of appearances. She does not become, like Anacanoa, a champion of the race:

> An unearthly pointlessness was her true manner, an all-inclusive manner that still contrived to be - as a duck sheds water from its wings - the negation of every threat of conquest and of fear - every shade of persecution wherein was drawn and mingled the pursued and pursuer alike, separate and yet one and the same person. (Palace of the Peacock, p.72)

The kind of unity being explored by Harris cancels out any real distinction between pursued and pursuer. The Arawak woman does not have to be depicted as either coward or heroine.

When the vessel enters the grip of the straits of momory, a curious metamorphosis takes place, in which things and people flow into one another. In this process, it is difficult to say whether it is the river which becomes woman or the woman, river, seeking to embrace the crew:

> Tiny embroideries resembling the handiwork on the Arawak woman's kerchief and the wrinkles on her brow, turned to incredible and fast soundless breakers and foam. Her crumpled bosom and river grew agitated with desire bottling and shaking every fear and inhibition and outcry. The ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew. (Palace of the Peacock, p.73)

The metamorphosis proceeds further. The old woman becomes young and majestic and attractive and embracing:

> This sudden insolence of soul rose and caught them from the powder of her eyes, and the age of her smile and the dust in her hair all flowing back upon them with silent streaming majesty and abnormal youth and in a wave of freedom and strength. (Palace of the Peacock, p.73)

And the crew, the river and the woman become one in a moment which includes past, present and future:

> Earthquake and volcanic water appeared to seize them and stop their ears, dashing the scales only from their eyes. They saw the naked unequivocal flowing peril and beauty and soul of the pursuer and pursued all together ..... (Palace of the Peacock, p.73)

All this takes place in a flashing moment on the journey, where, on a literal level, the boat has drifted into a dangerous rapid. Packed into the instant is an awareness or vision of the essential meaning, of all such journeys in the past, and of the spiritual unity of the characters.

Harris' presentation of the Indian is determined by the visionary concerns of his fiction. But that he builds with supreme logic out of a more conventional kind of characterisation (which is afterwards shown to be irrelevant) is clearly demonstrated in his handling of Petra in Heartland. Like Carew's Pancho and Mittelholzer's Kaywana, Petra is part Indian. The other side of her ancestry is given uncertainly as "Portuguese or Spanish." The tribe nevertheless accept her, "repressing the fact of her mixed racial stock." But when it is discovered that she is with child, Donne's or daSilva's, "no one knew for certain for whom", she is cast out, and begins a long flight which brings her to steal daSilva's rations and, with an imaginary pursuer on her trail, to seek rest at Kaiser's house. Here, her labour suddenly begins. Stevenson discovers her and helps in the birth. But as soon as he is out of the way she collects her moveable belongings and her child, and resumes flight.

This individualised presentation, however, is only the literal base from which Petra becomes the mother, the ancestral prototype for a new world. Harris uses Petra's ambiguous parentage not as a means of differentiating her in a heroic or pathetic way from other characters, but as the first stage in her absolute freedom from her historical situation. And her own uncertainty about the fathering of her child is not a function of savage promiscuity as it might have been in a more conventional presentation. Her promiscuity is the basis for a mythical all-inclusiveness. In this light, Harris describes her dismissal from the tribe in terms of a new birth, with intimations of immortality:

> At the time when her expulsion from the body of the tribe occurred, it left her dazed and beaten, immersed in the heart of a painful brooding insensibility, like one beginning to learn to live on technical scraps of stunned memory in a way she had only glimmeringly perceived before in a series of losses, raids and deprivations. (Heartland, p.68)

Even in her new life, Petra is not insensitive to "the old tribal mystery and knowledge that she was being followed and watched" but

> "The secret watchers or guardians she sensed were nowhere in sight and the surface of the ground nearly everywhere looked hard and stony; in some curious way she felt capable of growing attuned to this over and above irrational foreboding and longing." (Heartland, p.69)

So Petra's literal flight becomes for the reader, the flight of her race, and of man "across centuries it seemed of scorched self-surrender and self-arrival." (p.63). Her tiredness becomes "the soul of human fatigue", a confession of weakness, as it were, which "gave her a new and frail light of adjustment in relation to every dense journey she had made out of the far savannah of the sun" (p.63). And it is at this point that Harris daringly figures Petra as mother of the world's brood:

> Every strange, even tortured, mask of civilisation she had acquired along the way from brutal tribe to the dreaming constellation of humanity, from animal servitude to bearing the burden of the world's need for love - all these seemed to grow inward into the unsentimental chorus which is related to the epic origins of the mother of the brood. The dark voice of the river at her feet hissed like the stitch of stars upon every flowing button of her attire which was ripping loose. (Heartland, p.64)

But even at this highly mythical moment, Harris' artistic tact is in evidence. The narrative returns to the literal situation of the character: Petra's actual labour has begun.

It is possible to extract from Harris' novels a "true" picture of the Indians as a fading and invaded race. Within the fiction however, we see them becoming free of their historical status, turning into involuntary images in a conception of the essential unity of man. Because the historical situation is used only as a credible stepping-stone, Harris remains free of the stereotypes used by the other West Indian writers who have turned to the aboriginal Indian in their fictions.

There is a passing picture of integrated natures in a happy land in the early pages of The Arawak Girl, but the preceding discussion shows that no West Indian writer has idealised the aboriginal Indians or depicted the land in which they flourished as another Eden. While, however, it is easy enough to see why the social condition of the marginal Indian of today is not an issue in West Indian writing, the marginality of these communities cannot account for the absence of an ancestral Indian theme such as had developed in Latin American literature of the nineteenth century. For as Coulthard points out "it was in the countries which had not any Indians for years that the best works on the Indian theme were produced, in Uruguay and Santo Domingo."[11]

West Indian writers have been drawn, in fact, to celebrate Africa and the Africans in their fictions. Although this celebration is only one of several attitudes to Africa in West Indian fictions, it was the most spectacular one. And although it was at its most intense during a quite specific phase in West Indian and, indeed, in Negro history, it still has a certain currency in West Indian writing. The ways in which this literary manifestation has been misinterpreted too can be best approached through a comparison with nineteenth century Latin America.

The free peoples of the new republics were of Spanish origin. The relationship between Spanish colonists who actually possessed the land, and metropolitan Spain which exercised sovereignty over them was such that when conflict broke out between the two interests over the question of autonomy, the terms of that conflict remained strictly political and economic. It was in this context that literary Indianism made, according to Coulthard, "an important contribution to national and political integration" by providing an emotional link with the past (a non-Spanish past), and with the ancestors (not racial ancestors) represented

---

[11] Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature p.6

by the pre-Conquest inhabitants of the land. Two unambiguous features in this situation may be isolated: the highly conventionalised nature of literary Indianism, and the obviousness of its function in the growth of national feeling. Two further facts need to be recalled: the Latin American writers were not of Indian but of Spanish origin; and there were no Indians on the spot or within range to whom this conventionalised literature could in any way refer. The line between fiction and reality was as sharp as it was clear.

When we turn to consider the colonial engagement between the European peoples and the descendants of Africa in the Caribbean area, and the literature relating to this, a more complicated set of factors must be dealt with. The African had been forcibly separated from his native land and its people. In the New World, a degrading system of slavery defined the initial relationship between the Negro and the White man: the Negro in the mass became one of so many agricultural implements. What slavery started, colonialism carried on. In the emotive words of the Martiniquan political thinker, Frantz Fanon: "Colonialism is not satisfied merely withholding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. ... For colonialism this vast continent [Africa] was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals - in short, the Negro's country."[12]

After Emancipation, the West Indian Negro's attempts to define a national and cultural identity have been complicated by what has been felt as a necessarily antecedent need to undo the colonial work of devaluing Africa and the African past. Fanon continues: "The past is given back its value. Culture, extracted from the past to be displayed in all its splendour is not necessarily that of his own

---

[12]Frantz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth (1965) p.170 and p.171

country. ... The Negro, never so much a Negro as since he has been dominated by the Whites comes to realise that history points out a well-defined path to him: he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists."[13] The Pan-African and Pan-Negro movements of the twentieth century in which West Indians played so prominent a part were accompanied by a literary celebration of Africans, Africa and the African past, initially be writers in the Caribbean,[14] but also by American Negroes.

The numerical superiority of the Negro in the West Indies, and the fact that most West Indian authors are of African origin have been taken along with the celebration of Africa in West Indian and in Caribbean literatures to indicate the existence of an African culture in these areas. The fallacies this entails about the structure of West Indian society and the elements of West Indian literature can best be looked at through a discussion of the first of the three external approaches I indicated in the preliminaries to this chapter.

Neo-African Literature - Neo-African Culture

In the introduction to the massive and invaluable catalogue A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature, Jahnheinz Jahn defines his subject in terms of style:

> In contrast to Western literature ... Neo-African literature has certain stylistic elements which stem from Negro-African oral tradition. It is this style which characterises Neo-African literature and not the author's language (for the most part European) birthplace or colour of skin ... Works written by Africans which lack these specific stylistic elements do not belong to neo-African but to traditional African literature ... The main centres of neo-African literature are Africa, South of the Sahara and the Caribbean, but we find it also in other areas of the world where African and Western traditions have mixed: Latin America, North America and even Europe.[16]

---

[13] The Wretched of the Earth, p.171

[14] The terms "Dutch West Indies", "French West Indies" and "Spanish West Indies" will be used in this thesis to distinguish the colonies and ex-colonies adjacent to the English-speaking West Indies. The word "Caribbean" is used in its natural geographical sense to embrace all these territories bearing marks of association with the Imperial powers.

[15] Published in 1965.

[16] See page vii.

In the same introduction, however, Jahn confesses that the criteria for recognising neo-African literature are "still under discussion" and that "all the material which could be contained by such criteria has not yet been completely analysed." But there is much less reticence in Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture[17] an earlier publication by the same author where, as it happens the uniqueness and objectivity of these stylistic criteria, and their value as part of a critical method are put in serious doubt.

Discussing poetry written by Negroes in America, Jahn makes a distinction between "the spiritual style" of an older generation like Paul Lawrence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson, and the "agitation style" of poets of the nineteen-thirties like Sterling Brown and Robert Hayden. Between these two styles he locates the "blues or Harlem style" of the 'twenties exemplified by Langston Hughes and the emigre Jamaican Claude McKay: "In the 'spiritual style' the African component predominates, and in the 'agitation style' the Western. In the 'blues style' of Langston Hughes' poetry the two elements are evenly balanced."[18] In the commentary on James Weldon Johnson's 'Negro National Anthem' with which Jahn follows this mechanical ordering of his material, the neo-African qualities are discovered in "the imperative style", "the intensification through repetition", the "Nommo which transmutes the old Biblical images into new living actual images", and the "responsibility of the word". First of all, there is nothing specifically African about the stylistic features and the imaginative processes here enumerated. More damaging reflections arise when we look at the lines being "analysed".

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound low as the rolling sea.[19]

---

17 Published in translation by Faber and Faber in 1961. [German original, 1958]

18 Muntu, p.204. The discussion occurs between pages 200 and 204.

19 Quoted in Muntu p.200

The terms in which Jahn describes the stanza, and his enthusiastic tone do not seem justifiable from the words on the page. What the example helps to indicate is that "stylistic criteria" are being advanced to give an impression of objectivity while the author pursues a more subjective hypothesis.

In Muntu it is clear that Jahn's primary interest is in advancing a theory of neo-African culture of which neo-African literature is only a manifestation. In deliberate contrast to those ethnologists who stressed that there was a plurality of primitive cultures in Africa, Jahn envisages and gives prominence to a unified traditional culture applicable to the whole of Africa, South of the Sahara:

> It will be objected that there has never been a traditional African culture as a whole, but only a plurality of different 'primitive' cultures, and this objection will be supported by pointing to more or less accurate investigations by ethnologists. But the question of whether or not a plurality is understood as a unity is to a great extent one of interpretation.[20]

According to this interpretation, Neo-African culture arises out of the assimilation by the "traditional African culture" of European influences - not, of course, Europe's spiritual decadence, but its modern technology.

It is worth noting that the author goes on to recognise that there is an element of myth in construing a single traditional African culture:

> Moreover, if it is not objective, the conception of the tradition as it appears in the light of neo-African culture is nevertheless the only true one, since it is the one which will from now on determine the future of Africa. For several centuries Africa has had to suffer under the conception of the African past formed by Europe. As long as this was so, that European conception was 'true', that is to say, effective. But the present and future on the other hand will be determined by the conception that African intelligence forms of the African past.[21]

By associating his myth of a single traditional African culture with something quite different, a qualitative revaluation of the African past, Jahn unwittingly devalues the solid achievement of historians and anthropologists of the late

---

[20] Muntu p.17

[21] Muntu, pp. 17-18

nineteenth and the twentieth centuries[22] who have established, without recourse to myth that far from being a land of savages from time immemorial, and long before the European incursions, Africa had been the scene of a number of advanced civilisations.

But my purpose is not to examine the correctness or the possible relevance of Jahn's views for the future of Africa itself. My concern is with how the West Indies and West Indian literature become involved in the neo-African theory. If in Muntu Jahn infers that the Caribbean is a centre of neo-African literature, it is implied in A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature that the area is one of neo-African culture. Behind the peculiar circularity with which Jahn protects himself is the assumption of African cultural survival in the Caribbean (and therefore in the West Indies). It is this assumption that I want now to dispute, not so much because it is an easy target but because the ground to be covered is of relevance to succeeding issues.

The African Migrations: Devaluation, Acculturation and Survival

Africans brought to the West Indies came from nations "differing widely from each other in government, language, manners and superstitions." In The History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies (1793) Bryan Edwards distinguishes the various peoples according to national characteristics: "The circumstances which distinguish the Koromantyn or Gold Coast Negroes from all others are firmness both of body and mind; a ferociousness of disposition; but withal, activity, courage and a stubbornness, or what an ancient Roman would have deemed an elevation of soul which prompts them to enterprises of difficulty and danger. ..." The Koromantyns were always likely to play leading parts in slave rebellions. On the other hand, Edwards continues, the Eboes of the Niger delta were timid and despondent, frequently seeking "in a voluntary death, a refuge from their own melancholy reflections."

---

[22]See especially Basil Davidson, Old Africa Rediscovered (1959)

At first the groups themselves seem to have been conscious of their national or tribal differences. "The advantage possessed by a few of these people of being able to read and write, is a circumstance on which the Mandingo Negroes [from between the Niger and the Gambia] in the West Indies pride themselves greatly among the rest of the slaves; over whom they consider that they possess a marked superiority ..." Edwards at another point in the same chapter describes how at a branding of slaves, ten of whom were Koromantyn and ten, Eboes, the Eboes flinched and showed terror, "but the Koromantyn boys, laughing aloud and immediately coming forward of their own accord, offered their bosoms undauntedly to the brand, and receiving its impression without flinching in the least, snapt their fingers in exultation over the poor Eboes."[23]

But there is a brief illuminating passage in The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African (1789)[24] where the ex-slave, having described his capture, gives an account of the journey to the coast: "From the time I left my own nation I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned, and while I was journeying thus through Africa I acquired two or three different tongues. As in language, so more broadly in culture. The differences between the ways of life of the various groups of slaves from the West African coast were the differences between variants from a common culture area.[25] At any rate, forced association helped

---

[23] The History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies Vol. II, Book IV, Chapter III. These and subsequent quotations from Edwards are taken from the fifth edition of 1819.

[24] Quoted from p.20 of Equiano's Travels (1967) an abridgement with introduction and notes by Paul Edwards.

[25] For a useful pioneering discussion see Melville J. Herskovits The Myth of the Negro Past (N.Y., Harper and Brothers, 1941) especially Chapter II "The Search for Tribal Origins" and Chapter III "The African Cultural Heritage".

to eliminate some differences while giving emphasis to what was common to all groups. Edwards himself was well aware of the unifying effect of slavery upon the African nations in the islands:

> Having thus recited such observations as have occurred to me on contemplating the various African nations in the West Indies separately and distinct from each other, I shall now attempt an estimate of their general character and dispositions, influenced as undoubtedly they are in a great degree by their situation and condition in a state of slavery: circumstances that soon efface the native original impression which distinguishes one nation from another in Negroes newly imported, and create a similitude of manners, and a uniformity of character throughout the whole body.[26]

Amalgamation or generalisation was the continuing background process against which other more obvious modifications to the African cultures in the West Indies took place.

The migrations to the West Indies were not organised expeditions of communities in little; and on arrival in the New World the migrants were distributed not in family groups or by tribal origin but in accordance with the fortunes of the slave market. In his autobiography, the Ibo ex-slave, Olandah Equiano describes market day:

> We were not many days in the merchant's custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this: On a signal given (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated most of them never to see each other again.[27]

While too much can be made of these facts, it is nevertheless fair to suppose that even if the Africans had been free to reconstruct the full round of their traditional life, the way in which the migrants had been selected and the manner of their distribution would have intensified difficulties posed by a new physical environment.

---

[26]Bryan Edwards Vol. II, Bk. IV, Chapter III p.

[27]Equiano's Travels, pp. 31-32.

But the Africans were a subject people, not free to reconstruct the full round of their traditional lives. A simplified but accurate account in a recent text-book by four historians of the West Indies runs:

> In fact, the lives of the majority of slaves were spent in a continuous round of hard, enforced labour broken at intervals by some festive occasion such as Christmas, the end of crop-taking, the birthday of a master, or the marriage of his child. On these occasions there would be extra portions of imported salted beef or fish and a share-out of rum, and there would be dancing and singing in the light of flares and lanterns in the mill-yard or outside the great-house, or even inside for domestic slaves at Christmas. But normally, the routine of labour was interrupted only by the Sunday morning visit to market where the slaves gossiped and bought and sold the vegetables, fruit and other small produce raised by them on the estate provision-grounds.[28]

The usual working-day of the slaves lasted between sixteen to eighteen hours, according to the state of the crop. In these conditions, African political institutions as such became extinct; African social organisation and economic systems were disrupted; and since the needs of the slaves were supplied, however poorly, by the masters, African material culture and technical capabilities were denied expression.

Total elimination was, of course, impossible. The cultivation of their vegetable plots, the Sunday markets, and petty bartering among slaves would have ensured traces of African economic systems; and the promoting of slave rebellions as well as the total organisation of Maroon communities of runaway slaves would have given scope to social and political traditions. But when more positive factors in the acculturative process - the new physical environment and contact with the ways of the privileged master - are taken into account, it is not surprising that there is so much uncertainty in twentieth century attempts to discover survivals of African cultures in West Indian secular life. What is more relevant to our purposes, no West Indian novelist seeks to invoke Africa on this level. An interesting case is to be found in a novel by the Jamaican

---

[28] Augier, Gordon, Hall and Reckord The Making of the West Indies (1960) p.87.

W. G. Ogilvie. In Cactus Village there appears to be evidence for those who argue that the system of exchange labour is an African survival, and for those who take the view that the system evolves in different parts of the world in response to analogous conditions. Ogilvie's villagers rally to help the hero:

> Hezekiah was slim but wiry and strong. He was determined that none of these men who had given him a free day's labour should do more than he. His axe rang out with the best of them. His blows were measured and slower than those of some of his companions, but he was very accurate. He very seldom made a foul cut. As time went on the others noticed that his voice called most frequently when a tree was about to fall.
>
> During this time the women were not idle. As the cutlass-men cleared the bush, the women followed with long hooked sticks behind them. The fallen shrubs were hauled into large heaps; usually on some rocky spot, where they would be left to quail until they were dry enough to burn. All worked hard, but all were cheerful. (Cactus Village, p.8)

A few paragraphs later there is an authorial gloss which runs:

> Among the Jamaican peasantry it was an established custom that when a man was going to start a new cultivation he would call on his friends for a day's work. He was supposed to provide food and water. No other payment was necessary. Of course, whenever any of them called upon him for assistance he was expected to give it. Still, if a man were not very popular he would get only a few people to attend his "match", and those who came would not labour very hard. (Cactus Village, p.9)

The example from Cactus Village is of interest because in an earnest preface the author poured scorn on "the 'Negraryans' who wish the world to believe that all their ancestors come from Western Europe" and who "dread any backward glance at our national beginnings". Ogilvie, nevertheless, abstains from claiming that there is an African element in the system of exchange labour described in the novel. The rest of Cactus Village provides plenty of evidence that the abstinence is not an example of artistic self-control. If, as has been suggested,[29] exchange labour is an African cultural survival in the West Indies, Ogilvie was not sophisticated enough to be aware of it. Indeed, his seeming to celebrate this feature of peasant life as peculiarly Jamaican tends to imply at least an unconscious leaning to the "analogous conditions" theory.

---

[29] By M. G. Smith in "West Indian Culture", Caribbean Quarterly Vol. 7, No. 3, Dec. 1961.

The ambiguous case in Cactus Village is not of literary significance in itself, but it does help to demonstrate how elusive African cultural survivals in the West Indies may be, or at any rate, how little scope there is for the West Indian novelist who wishes to evoke Africa in these terms. There is a different reason for glancing through fiction at another possible African influence in West Indian secular life. In many West Indian novels, Negro characters belonging to the socially depressed class (slum dwellers or labouring peasants) generally live together without benefit of Church marriage. Many main characters do this: Surjue and Rema in The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953) and Shine and Jesmina in Brother Man (1954) by Roger Mais; Joe and Rita in Samual Selvon's A Brighter Sun (1952); Nathan and Ruby in Austin C. Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965); and Shark and Belle in Black Midas (1958) by Jan Carew. It is implicit in these novels from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and Guyana that the background characters live in the same way.

Using historical and sociological evidence, Philip Curtin[30] advances Negro concubinage and the preference of the woman for this kind of marriage as "one example of the adaptation of the African cultures to Jamaican life":

> The planters had little interest in the sexual mores of the slaves. The slaves made whatever sexual union they chose and these were usually more permanent than simple promiscuity. The Jamaican Negro normally had a "wife" perhaps more than one. This family made a social unit that had nothing to do with the blessing of the established church. ... By the time the missionaries arrived on the scene, Afro-Jamaican "marriage" was too well established to be easily changed.

It is possible to argue even from Curtin's account that the conditions of slavery were by themselves enough to establish concubinage among West Indian Negroes expecially in view of the examples set by the masters and lamented by Lady Nugent:[31]

---

[30]Philip D. Curtin Two Jamaicas (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1955) p.25. The title of a Jamaica Legislative Council report cited in a note by Curtin is highly indicative: "Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Prevalence of Concubinage and the High Rate of Illegitimacy (Kingston, 1941)."

[31]Lady Nugent's Journal (1839), Entry for April 8, 1802.

> Mrs. Bell told me today that a negro man and woman of theirs, who are married, have fourteen grown-up children, all healthy field negroes. This is only one instance, out of many, which proves that the climate of this country being more congenial to their constitutions, they would increase and render the necessity of the Slave Trade out of the question, provided the masters were attentive to their morals, and established matrimony among them. But white men of all descriptions, married or single, live in a state of licentiousness with their female slaves. Until a great reformation takes place on their part, neither religion, decency nor morality can be established among the negroes. An answer that was made to Mr. Shirley, a Member of the Assembly (and a profligate character, as far as I can understand) who advised one of his slaves to marry, is a strong proof of this: 'Hi Massa, you telly me marry one wife which is no good! You no tinky I see you buckra no content wid one, two, tree or four wifes?'

But it is less important to determine the specific origin of West Indian concubinage than to be aware that it exists among a substantial section of the population. Among the same groups, however, there is an awareness of the marriage institution, and aspirations towards it either as a result of improved economic circumstances or in order to earn respectability. This has bearings on West Indian fiction which I examine in Chapter V where it is also argued that the existence of concubinage in the external social situation is crucially involved in Roger Mais' explorations of the human psyche. I should like to continue here, however, with some other aspects of African cultural survivals in the West Indies.

If African economic and social organisations were changed beyond easy recognition in the slave context, traditional arts and crafts were virtually wiped out. In this connection it is useful to look at the only instance in West Indian fiction where an author allows a connection to be made between an element of West Indian secular life, and the African heritage.

Obadiah the central character in Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962) is possessed of an instinctive skill at wood-carving:

> One evening, he sat with Hugh on the pavement outside the shop. As they chatted together he whittled idly with his knife at a piece of wood. He was unaware of what he was doing until he realised that Hugh was nudging him and grinning slyly. He looked down at what he had made and saw a roughly-hewn miniature of his mother as she danced at a Pocomania meeting,

her eyes wide and lost in a cold ecstasy, her breasts taut like thorns, her legs strong and powerful, the muscles raised and trembling as if with a fever - Obadiah had recaptured and imprisoned all this in wood forever. (The Hills of Hebron, p.144)

Later in the novel Obadiah's self-discovery coincides with the end of a painful estrangement from his wife Rose. At this point, Miss Wynter introduces a second wood-carving episode:

But as he sat waiting, he took up a fragment of wood and carved idly, thinking of making a toy for the child. Then as he shaped the rough outlines of a doll, he began to concentrate. For the first time in his life he created consciously, trying to embody in his carving his new awareness of himself and of Hebron. When he had finished he put the doll in his pocket and left Hebron as twilight settled into the hollow spaces between the hills. (The Hills of Hebron, p.259)

Obadiah's adjustment to Hebron, and his self-discovery are intended to symbolise the West Indian Negro's adjustment to the West Indies. That it is not Miss Wynter's intention to suggest that African wood-carving skills have survived in the West Indies is clear both from the presentation of Obadiah as unique in this respect, and from a later episode in the novel when a visiting German scholar buys the carving from Obadiah:

'Tell me, what legend did you carve this doll from?'
Obadiah looked confused.
'You see this carving looke like ones that I saw in Africa ... when I was there ... I write books about sculpture ... carvings like these ... I make too, myself but in marble, not in wood ... like you do ... like they do in Africa, where your ancestors came from. And there they carve from father to son, and they carve out of the stories of their tribe, and their beliefs, their gods and devils. I bought a carving once that was made by the Dahomey ... they made this out of a belief that each man has four souls, one given to him by an ancestor ... one, his own, the third, the small bit of the Creator that lives in each man, the last one, that which joins him to the others in his group. The carving was one that I lost and yours is like it. That is why I ask, what belief did you carve this doll from? I would like to buy it from you ... if you will sell it to me?'
(The Hills of Hebron, p.274)

Having thus contrived that the African connection be made, Miss Wynter closes the incident with Obadiah's Hebron-orientated reply:

> Obadiah nodded. This would mean food and water for Rose and the child. Besides, this man was no longer a stranger, for he had understood at once that there was more to the doll than the wood and the shape he had fashioned. So he told the man the story of Hebron, of their search for God, for it was out of this, the dream and the reality that he had carved the doll. (The Hills of Hebron p.274)

Obadiah's wood-carving skill, the reader must conclude, is the instinctive expression of an obscure heritage preserved in the African personality.

The Hills of Hebron is in line with the fictional celebration of Africa which was part of Caribbean Negritude. For "the African personality", an imaginary Africa, and the African continental past were the three key terms in that celebration. When we look at the devalued and shattered forms of African religions in the West Indies, and then at expressions of these in West Indian fiction the unreliability of that celebration as an index of African culture in the West Indies will become further apparent. At the same time we will arrive at a position from which it ought to be possible to document that celebration and to understand why it took place when it did.

African religious survivals in West Indian Life

Little is known about the beliefs and practices of the African slaves, but modern reconstructions[32] suggest there was considerable uniformity in the religious and supernatural beliefs of the several West African peoples. The gods ranged from a remote Supreme Being to a less remote pantheon whose members personified natural forces, to the defied ancestors who were in direct contact with living descendants. At this level there was a multiplication of cults, with drums, dancing, dreams and spirit-seizure as part of organised worship. The sacrifice was offered by the head of the family who, as the oldest member, was about to join the ancestors, and so was a natural intermediary between the living

---

[32] See Melville J. Herskovits The Myth of the Negro Past, pp. 69-74 and Philip Curtin Two Jamaicas, pp. 28-31.

and the dead. African religion was thus built upon intuitions of the closeness of the spirit world to the world of the living. African magic and supernatural practices including the use of charms and fetishes, derived from the same source, but the West African peoples made a clear distinction between religion and magic.

The summary I have given above derives from modern reconstructions, but a much earlier description of the religion of the "Koromantyn Negroes" in their native place is highly corroborative. It occurs in Bryan Edwards' The History ..., and Edwards claims that his readers are indebted for it "to the researches of an ingenious gentleman of Jamaica, who is well acquainted with their language and manners." I shall quote at length from this account because it strikes me as a plausible one which does not seem to have been commented upon by sociologists:

> They believe that Accompong, the God of the heavens, is the creator of all things; a Deity of infinite goodness; to whom however they never offer sacrifices, thinking it sufficient to adore him with praises and thanksgiving.
>
> Besides the above deities, every family has a peculiar tutelar saint who is supposed to have been originally a human being like one of themselves, and the first founder of their family; upon the anniversary of whose burial, the whole number of his descendants assemble round his grave, and the oldest man, after offering up praises to Accompong, Assarci, Ipboa, and their tutelar deity, sacrifices a cock or goat by cutting its throat, and shedding the bood upon the grave. Every head of a household of the family next sacrifices a cock, or other animal, in like manner, and as soon as all those who are able to bring sacrifices have made their oblations, the animals which have been killed are dressed, and a great festival follows.[33]

This elaborate religion could not be practised in the slave context. Imperfect transmission, the restrictions of the masters who forbade open worship, and the psychological pressures of the new situation altered and impoverished African religion and drove it closer to magic. "By the 1830's", according to Curtin, "many of the original distinctions between African religion and magic were probably lost to the Negroes themselves."[34] Not only for Negroes, more

---

[33] Bryan Edwards, The History ... Vol II pp. 85-86

[34] Two Jamaicas, p.29

emphatically for the White man African religion became the religion of the fetish. It was comprehended in the spectacular word "Obeah". The Church's attitude is well illustrated in the title of a publication of 1894: Jamaica Superstitions or The Obeah Book: a Complete Treatise of the Absurdities Believed in by the People of the Island by the Rector (Native) of St. Peter's Church, Hope Bay, Portland.[35]

The processes of decomposition and adaptation are difficult to trace in the slave period because there are few contemporary accounts, and because those which we have are written out of an alien and unsympathetic point of view. With the full tide of missionary activity after Emancipation, descriptive sketches of African religion proliferate but much of their value is diminished by zeal and hysteria: "For upwards of a hundred years after Jamaica became an appendage of the British Crown, scarcely an effort was made to instruct the slaves in the great doctrines and duties of Christianity .... It may be emphatically said that darkness covered the land, and gross darkness the people." The Rev. James Phillippo went on to say that most of the Negroes did indeed possess "some notion of a Supreme Being" but that "serpents, lizards, the yellow snake and other revolting reptiles, also ranked high in the polluted catalogue of their divinities."[36] And as if bent on making things as desperate as possible in order to report a later overwhelming missionary success, he quoted from a speech by Bryan Edwards in the House of Commons: "As to sending missionaries among them I speak from my own knowledge when I say that they are cannibals and that instead of listening to a missionary they would certainly eat him."

But biased as the reportage may be the general picture of mechanical rituals and beliefs dissociated from a theology and becoming increasingly so, is

---

[35]By T. Banbury, published in Jamaica.

[36]James M. Phillippo, Jamaica: Its Past and Present State, (1843) See Chapter XV.

substantially true. Edward Long's account of 1774 is specially useful for my purposes. After recognising that the Negroes "firmly believe in the apparition of spectres", Long registers the pre-eminence by this time of the obeah-man: "The most sensible among them fear the supernatural powers of the African obeah men or pretended conjurers; often ascribing those mortal effects to magic which are only the natural operation of some poisonous juice or preparation dexterously administered by these villians." In the subsequent description of the establishment of a myal society, Long happens to catch an instance of the fusion of African religion and African maigc; at the same time we can see the incursion of non-religious needs which is a typical feature of twentieth century cults in the islands: "Not long since, some of these execrable wretches in Jamaica introduced what they called a myal dance, and established a kind of society, into which they invited all they could. The lure hung out was that every Negro initiated into the myal society would be invulnerable by the white men; and although they might in appearance be slain, the obeah man could, at his pleasure restore the body to life."[37] Myalism became associated with slave rebellions.

But the two terms "obeah" and "myalism" contained remnants of the original distinction between African religion and African magic:

> The obeah man was a private practitioner, hired by his client for a specific purpose while the myal man was the leader of a cult group devoted to organised religious activity. Like the obeah man he tried to control the supernatural world of the shadows, but protection from obeah was only incidental to his work. Myal practices were also designed to prevent duppies from doing harm, to help people recover their lost shadows, and genrally to propitiate the world of spirits. Myal practice was especially associated with dances performed before the silk-cotton tree, one of the favourite haunts of duppies. The dances were designed to lure back the duppies of those who had lost them - a complicated procedure involving sacrifices of chickens, drumming, dancing, spirit-possession of a person in a trance, drugs, and other elements very close to African religions.[38]

---

[37] Edward Long The History of Jamaica (1774) Vol. II, Bk. III, Chapter 3 p.416.

[38] Philip Curtin Two Jamaicas p.30

An awareness of this distinction, and a recognition of growing secular motives help us to understand the nature and function of contemporary manifestations.

For while myalism had lost its purely religious character by the time the missionaries began to toil in the West Indies, its leader-group pattern and its agitation elements were not uncongenial to the Baptist and Methodist systems. To the survivals and mutations of African religion embodied in myalism were added elements of Christianity - preaching, Christian hymns, the Bible, and prophesying in the name of God. In this way began the Afro-Christian cults, versions of which exist in the West Indies today. But it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that they attained greatest numerical strength, and it was in the 1860's that their African elements reached a spectacular climax. One factor behind the continuation of myalism had been the need of the exceptional or ambitious individual for self-expression, and the yearning of the mass for a leadership with which they could identify. Both impulses were greater after Emancipation than before it. So there was a proliferation of break-away cults in which the non-Christian elements tended to be more and more emphasised. These cults were abhorred by the orthodox Church. But even among the classes that remained associated with the Missions, African elements were strong. They were given clearest expression in the 1860's. When the Great Revival that swept through the United States and then Britain was brought to Jamaica where it caught on, the missionaries' initial joy was soon confounded: "Like a mountain stream, clear and transparent as it springs from the rock, but which becomes foul and repulsive as impurities are mingled with it in its onward course, so with this extraordinary movement."[39] There were oral confessions, trances and dreams, "prophesying", spirit seizure, wild dancing, flagellation and mysterious sexual

---

39 William James Gardner A History of Jamaica From Its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the Year 1872 (1873) p.467. Quoted in Two Jamaicas, p.171.

doings among the religiously excited Negroes. In the words of Curtin, "the Great Revival had turned African." The Negro Revivalists were disowned by the missionaries who had initiated the movement. The Revivalists thus became a permanent addition to the already outcast Afro-Christian cults.

The social advantages attaching to orthodox Christianity, contempt for "African superstition", the increase in popular education, and political fanaticism have meant that the twentieth century cults are few, and in most cases, are poorly attended. The Baptist shouters of Trinidad whose practice shows a combination of Christianity and Yoruban Shango worship,[40] do not appear in the 1960 Census but they cannot constitute even as much as 1% of the population. There is only a tenuous connection between the Jordanites of Guyana and African religious systems: they are (or were in 1927) teetotallers and vegetarians believing in baptism by immersion, Saturday sabbath and wearing the costume our great-grandfathers from Africa wore".[41] Among the Ras Tafarians,[42] the non-religious motives that have always operated in the practice of the cults are especially prominent. The movement exists in Jamaica where the black masses are victims of social and economic deprivation on a larger scale than in any other West Indian territory.[43] Not only its numerical strength (it is the largest of West Indian cults) but elements in its practice reveal socio-economic pressures: the smoking of marijuana ("the weed", "ganja") and the wish to return to "Ethiopia" are both expressions of a desire to escape from a depressing reality.

---

[40] See M. and F. S. Herskovits Trinidad Village (N.Y. 1947) especially Chapter VIII.

[41] A visit to a Jordanite meeting house in 1927 is described in N. E. Cameron's Thoughts on Life and Literature (Guyana, 1950) pp. 135-141.

[42] See The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica by Smith, Augier and Nettleford, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies (1960).

[43] See Katrin Norris Jamaica: the Search for an Identity (1962) pp. 43-60.

The cults on the fringes of twentieth century West Indian society derive ultimately from myalism. To African magic, similarly, can be traced the rapidly fading belief in the obeah man, controller of fetishes, and healer versed in the use of herbs and other kinds of folk medicines. But while these modern manifestations preserve, in a sense, the distinction between African religion and African magic, they do not justify a theory of cultural survival in these fields. With this background I want to look at the presentation of obeah and cult practices in West Indian fiction.

Obeah and Cult Practices in West Indian Fiction

Obeah and cult practices, associated with socially depressed characters, appear in novels by West Indians of every racial origin. The degree of prominence and authorial attitudes vary, but the basic details are recurrent. I shall deal first with varieties of obeah manifestations, concentrating on the obeah man as a fictional character and on the contexts in which the fetish appears.

In Brown Sugar (1966), a novel by the White West Indian J. B. Emtage, Negro terror of the fetish is introduced in a mocking and comic spirit. Emtage's White characters are disturbed by a wailing and a screaming from the Negro servants' section of the house. Dr. Pierce hurries to investigate, and the screaming dies away to "dull moaning, surrounded by chattering voices."

> Dr. Pierce returned holding a bottle which contained about two ounces of blood. From the neck protruded the severed head of a black cock, eyes and beak wide open as though in full crow. He moved some holly, and placed it beside the port decanter.
> 'Shall I circulate it, sir?' asked Killon. 'Clockwise of course.'
> Martini bounced in from the library, carrying her learned volumes. She dropped these promptly, and clasped her hands in ecstasy before the cock's bloody head.
> 'An obiah!' she whispered. 'A strong obiah. How lovely. Who is it on?' (Brown Sugar p.48)

The White amusement at obeah is in superior contrast to the panic of the maid Desde, upon whom the fetish has been planted: "I found her sitting facing it on

the floor with her apron over her head, wailing like an air-raid warning. Half a tumbler of neat rum has restored her a little, but she is quite convinced she is marked for death, and has tied her head up in a banana leaf. It's cool of course, and keeps duppies away" (p.48).

Obeah is used in a different way in a novel by another White West Indian. In Christopher (1959), Geoffrey Drayton's novel of childhood, the boy Christopher lives in the protected world of the Great House. Both his growing up process, and his increasing familiarity with the Negro world around him are symbolised in his changing attitudes to obeah: he moves in the novel from ignorance, to mystification, to childish involvement, and finally to understanding in psychological terms of how obeah operates. By this time, he has begun to put his childhood behind him and take a less spectacular view of his Black countrymen. To put it in this way is to simplify and underline, but Drayton conveys the boy's complex states and his development in a subtle and unobtrusive style that is high art.

Both Emtage and Drayton make literary capital of obeah. So too does V. S. Naipaul in The Suffrage of Elvira (1958). In this novel, Naipaul's comic effects derive from the doctrinal confusion of Hindu, Muslim and Christian in the newly democratic Elvira: "Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims and Christians owned a Bible; the Hindus, and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights." In the political campaign around which the novel is built, the Hindu speculator Surujpat Harbans is up against a Negro candidate called Preacher. Harbans has the support of Baksh a Muslim tailor; Preachers staunchest supporter is Cuffy who runs a shoe-repair shop called "The United African Pioneer Self-Help Society."

Returning home drunk one night Baksh sees a "big big dog" on the inner stairs. In the morning, all that can be seen is Herbert's tiny puppy. Baksh is convinced there is obeah at work. And Mrs. Baksh is convinced that the obeah-dog means deathfor the family by Preacher's will. The puppy is quickly removed. When Mahadeo visits Cuffy for help in compiling a list of sick and dying Negroes, Cuffy, forewarned by Loorkhor, suspects a sinister plan for a counter attack by the Bakshes.

> Mahadeo brought out his red pocket-notebook and a small pencil. 'I have to ask you a few questions, Mr. Cawfee.' He tried some elementary flattery: 'After all, you is a very important man in Elvira.'
> Mr. Cuffy liked elementary flattery. 'True,' he admitted. 'It's God's will.'
> 'Is what I think too. Mr. Cawfee, how your negro people getting on in Elvira?'
> 'All right, I believe, praise be to God.'
> 'You sure, Mr. Cawfee?'
> Mr. Cuffy squinted. 'How you mean?'
> 'Everybody all right? Nobody sick or anything like that?'
> 'What the hell you up to, Mahadeo?'
> Mahadeo laughed like a clerk in a government office. 'Just doing a job, Mr. Cawfee. Just a job. If any negro fall sick in Elvira, you is the fust man they come to, not true?'
> Mr. Cuffy softened. 'True'
> 'And nobody sick?'
> 'Nobody.' Mr. Cuffy didn't care for the hopeful note in Mahadeo's voice.
> Mahadeo's pencil hesitated, disappointed. 'Nobody deading or dead?'.
> Mr. Cuffy jumped up and dropped the black book. 'Obeah!' he cried, and took up an awl. 'Obeah'. Loorkhoor was right. You people trying to work some Obeah. Haul you tail outa my yard! Go on, quick sharp.'
> (The Suffrage of Elvira, p.80)

Not only are Naipaul's Muslims susceptible to the obeah-dog. They are capable putatively, of terrifying the Negroes by an equally effective use of obeah. The brilliant climax to Naipaul's obeah-dog episode comes when the puppy returns limping along the main street causing consternation and awe among men, women and children, Christians, Hindus and Muslims in the "glorious" walk to the house of the terrified Bakshes (pp. 115-119). In Naipaul's fictional world, there is no attempt to restrict obeah to Negroes. It would be a mistake to read from the novel back into the society if one did not have knowledge of the society beforehand. But

Naipaul's fiction corresponds with fact at this point: in the West Indies, belief in obeah may be found among the illiterate and depressed whatever their race or religion.

Obeah manifestations occur in other West Indian novels either as a passing event or as an aspect of the life of the socially depressed, but no other West Indian novelist has used it to such literary effect as Emtage, Drayton and Naipaul. The obeah man as a fictional character also occurs frequently, but again, few writers have given him centrality or attempted to explore his consciousness as a unique person. The obeah man Bra' Ambo, in Roger Mais' second novel Brother Man may be used in illustration of the general trend. He is a mercenary fraud who sells ganja and mints counterfeit coins. Early in the novel, it seemed as if Mais was building towards a straight clash between the Christian love of Bra' Man and the African superstition of Bra' Ambo:

> Everybody knew that Bra' Ambo was a powerful obeah man.
> Bra' Ambo himself had given it out that he was a higher scientist than Bra' Man, for' - and he washed his hands before him, and smiled smugly - 'Bra' Man study de science of de stars, astrology, an' I study de science of de stars too, but I study higher than dat, for I study de science of de Dead.'
> It was given to few 'scientors', he explained, to be able to read and understand the Book of the Dead. And he was one of them, and a man named De Lawrence, over the water, was another. And the way he said it, it might have been it was just the two of them, and no more - smirking like a cat before a saucer of milk, and washing his hands in the air.
> When people came and told this to Bra' Man he only smiled and said, 'Let Bra' Ambo go on studying his 'Book of the Dead'. And he looked over their heads and said, 'There is the Book of Life open before him from cover to cover, let him seek to study that, if he will.' (Brother Man, pp.84-85)

In the event, conflict never takes place. Ambo is flatly presented as the type of the exploiting obeah man, and seen completely from the outside. Mais settles to using him simply as a foil to the Christ-like Bra' Man.

Mais' Ambo is constructed out of educated attitudes to the obeah man and his presence in the novel is determined by the needs of an intention focused on the holy central character. Only one West Indian novelist has made an obeah man the central

character in his fiction; although conventional attitudes to the obeah man appear in the novel and although Ismith Khan allows Zampi some strokes of supernatural power, The Obeah Man (1964) grows away from the documentary and the spectacular to beome a serious fictional study of self-definition. In the process, a highly personal view of obeah as a spiritual vocation is disclosed.

Zampi the fictional obeah man is not a Negro. We are told in fact, that he "has no race, no caste, no colour; he was the end of masses of assimilations and mixtures, having the eyes of the East Indian, the build of the Negro, the skin of the Chinese, and some of the colour of all" (p.11). But Khan's creative intention is most clearly indicated by the use of the obeah man as the novel's centre of consciousness. For it is difficult to imagine how such an approach would have worked if the characterisation of the obeah man had been limited to illustrating the type as in other West Indian novels. Zampi is presented as a man ill at ease in a blighted world which he sees swallowing up all his people: "It ain't have no place for we. The islands drowning and we going down with them - down, down, down. One day the clocks in the big church and them go stop and nobody here to fix them or wind them up ... We is nobody, and we ain't have nowhere to go. Everything leave me with a cold, cold feeling in my insides, and I ain't have no uses for you or nobody nor nothing - nothing ..." (pp. 66-67). Zampi's malaise arises out of an extraordinary sensitivity, and it puts him at odds with himself and with his woman Zolda. It also alienates him from the unthinking people whom he wishes to serve.

In this way, Khan makes Zampi a credible fictional character, and a problematic one, whose actions and thought processes we are interested in following. The presentation of Zampi as obeah man is functional within a larger design. A wayside vendor abuses Zampi for "playin' with the devel" (p.9); a tourist guide refers to him as "a voodoo practitioner ... a witch-doctor" representing "vestiges

of the dead past ... the darkness and fumblings of prehistoric man"; and Zampi himself reflects on his ability to "cast spells on the one hand, and on the other exorcise spells cast by other obeah men". But he is presented by the author as a healer of men's souls and bodies. It is only when Zampi fully recognises this vocation that he learns to accept his alienation as a necessary condition of his art, and of his particular existence.

> ... An obeah man had to practise at distancing himself from all things. He had to know joy and pleasure as he knew sorrow and pain, but he must also know how to withdraw himself from its torrent, he must be in total possession of himself, and at the height of infinite joy he must know with all of his senses all that lives and breathes about him. He must never sleep the sleep of other men, he must have a clockwork in his head. He must at a moment's notice be able to shake the rhythm from his ear, to hold his feet from tapping. He must know the pleasure in his groin and he must know how to prevent it from swallowing him up.
>
> And Zampi knew these things, he had his life in rein. He knew now that he would not be plagued with indecision, with the ebbing of time.
>
> (The Obeah Man, pp. 154-155)

Khan manages to make this saintly obeah man a convincing fictional character. If The Obeah Man fails, it fails because too much is made to depend upon a naive philosophy of self-control. This is not too obtrusive in the presentation of Zampi, since Khan expresses the conflict within his central character in dramatic terms and makes the acceptance of partial withdrawall a logical act of choice that was always latent in the hero's attitudes and behaviour. But when the relationship between Zampi and Zolda is done in terms of aspiring spirit and voluptuous flesh such a crude externalisation does little justice to Khan's own intuitions embodied in the actual presentation of Zampi. As a result, the end of the novel is confused. Zolda's decision to return to the hills with Zampi in pursuit of higher life strikes the reader as too arbitrarily contrived. And Khan slips uncertainly back to the pre-conversion state of the character by allowing her to wish (in another of the lurid patches of writing that mars the work) "to have him possess her with thrusts like lightning bolts that would scorch her loins" (p.186).

Returning to the obeah man theme, it is worth pointing out that Zampi is the spiritual opposite of Mais' sociologically accurate Bra' Ambo. How far Khan has availed himself of the artist's prerogative to distort "facts" is better illustrated by making the comparison with Bra' Man: Zampi the obeah man is no less an exponent of charity (and more credible as a fictional character) than Mais' shadowy and Christ-like hero in Brother Man. Khan makes his obeah man a centre of interest by complicating his psyche and re-interpreting his practice. No other West Indian writer has got around the denigrating view of obeah which is justly current in West Indian society. Not only do these writers refuse to celebrate obeah as an African heritage; both in Naipaul's comic treatment and in Khan's selection of a non-Negro as his obeah man there is evidence to confirm our knowledge that in the West Indies of the early twentieth century, obeah was just as likely to be believed in by illiterate Indians as by illiterate Negroes. Similar confirmations may be found in the literary presentation of cult practices to which I shall now turn.

With one complex exception,[44] all the cults which appear in West Indian novels are modelled in a documentary fashion upon the social reality. While there are variations in authorial attitudes, and different fictional purposes at work, all the novels agree in locating the cults among the illiterate and socially depressed; and there is a general concurrence as to what are "African" elements. The whole "religious" spectrum in West Indian life may be illustrated from these works. Before looking at some of the novels that show a degree of artistic control I would like to use Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962) as a documentary frame.

At the furthest end of the spectrum in this work is a pocomania cult presided over by an obeah man. The Pocomania cultists are the West Indian equivalent to

---

[44] See the discussion of George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960), later in this chapter.

Haitian voodoo worshippers: "These voodoo followers of the 'obeah man', Ambrose, believed in the malevolent cruel spirits opposed to man. Theirs was a lost god of Africa, who for their sins, had abandoned them. And the only contact they could have with him was realised during the passing 'ecstasy' of being possessed by the 'spirit'. Then they could feel the closeness of his presence, even divine his name. Once a week, the big drums summoned the worshippers to the 'spiritual dancing', so that the faithful could labour together in search of their god" (p.115). In Miss Wynter's fictional community there are only forty Pocomanians, the fewness of the adherents corresponding to sociological fact. When in the novel Prophet Moses arrives to institute the "Brethren Believers in Heaven Now", the Pocomanians dwindle

The "Believers" in the novel correspond to the break-away Afro-Baptist cults. In one of the good moments of the novel, Miss Wynter presents the founder of the "Believers" as a mock-Moses: "After the Lord had tested the young Moses for many years, He finally guided him to the house of a white man, an American Baptist preacher" (pp. 106-107). After three years of instruction in the Holy Book, Moses has a vision[45] which he confesses to his first convert: "It was just a day like any other, Sister Edwards. No sign to mark it as different. I was watering the flowers. I came to a rhododendron bush that stood along by itself. As I poured out water at the root, I see the whole bush light up with fire before my eyes. I step back, I stand still, I watch. The bush flamed orange and green fire. The Presence of God was all round about me. I fall on my knees, I bow my head to the earth. I make to take off my shoes but as it wasn't Sunday, I wasn't wearing any. And the ground on which I was standing, Sister Edwards, was holy, holy, ground" (p.107). Taking the Lord's advice, Moses shakes the dust of Kingston off his feet and builds his temple in a Cockpit Centre. Moses' disciples sell their possessions, and with their money he feeds and clothes them "in white robes and

---

[45] My italics to indicate realistic cult element.

turbans". Moses preaches night after night and prophesies, setting "a time and limit to the travail which had been theirs and their ancestors' for three hundred years. On December 31st of that same year [of the founding] he would fly to heaven. Once there he would send back golden chariots to take them up so that they could lay claim to the Kingdom" (p.109). On the day of deliverance, Moses climbs a giant breadfruit tree, the faithful clustered below: "He looked to them like some strange and magical fruit about to be plucked by a hand from heaven" (p.115). Continuing the comic deflation, Miss Wynter shifts to authorial reportage: "There are garbled accounts of what actually happened to the Prophet that morning. Some said that his fall was an accident, that his foot caught in a branch and he stumbled. Others maintained that he literally spread out his arms and flew off, and when he was half-way up was cast down again by the forces of Satan" (p.116). With the failure of the Prophet his followers change their allegiance. Some return to Pocomania, others join the orthodox church and introduce "African" elements.

Reverend Brooke is somewhat disturbed by his flock's hearts of darkness: "There was something atavistic about their singing, as though they were shouting to recall lost gods from the primeval forests of Africa. And at times their singing stirred up secret urges in the Reverend's own heart which had been slumbering through centuries of civilisation" (p.120). Miss Wynter seldom loses the opportunity to make her polemic point but the incursions of rhythmic singing and other "African" manifestations into the orthodox Church did in fact disturb the missionaries in the nineteenth century.

When Moses returns after five years at a lunatic asylum he is able to found the "New Believers" by confessing that his previous failure was a punishment from above: "And, Brothers and Sisters, when my heart was broken as my leg had been, my pride was humbled as my heart had been, then, yea, even then, the Lord came to me in the still dark of the night, and the touch of His hand burn me like fire and

sting me like ice, but His voice was kind and the hand that He touched me with was ... black ... like mine!" (p.172). The Black God religion Moses now preaches is a fictionalised representation of the teachings of Marcus Garvey[46]; the exodus to the land of milk and honey in the hills of Hebron corresponds to Garvey's back to Africa dream. Miss Wynter's "New Believers" are invented, but the two basic elements in their creed actually belong to the Jamaican Ras Tafarians who held that Haile Selassie (Ras Tafari the Emperor of Ethiopia) is the living God and that the black man's salvation lies in repatriation to Africa. This cult appears in Orlando Patterson's The Children of Sisyphus (1964) discussed below. Miss Wynter deflates all the cults so accurately documented in her novel, and underlines their socio-economic basis by allowing Moses to become unnerved when a labour leader wins the sympathy of the Cockpit Centre people by painting for them "the extent of their misery, the hopelessness of their poverty, the lack of any future for their children" (p.204). He advises them to have nothing to do with churches ("All that is finished and done"), rather they should believe in organised labour,[47] and Man. Determined to justify his Black God, Moses now advertises his intention to be crucified like Jesus. His terrified wish to be taken down from the cross is not heard. He dies a martyr, and the Hebron community respond to his supreme sacrifice by not doubting the validity of the crucifixion of their God, black like themselves: "Moses alone had died, but Hebron, its past, present and future were entombed with him, awaiting his resurrection" (p.224). The New Believers remain ossified in their delusion.

Miss Wynter's diffuse novel contains more information but less art than any other work in which cults appear. In Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959),

---

[46]There is a discussion of Garvey's Pan-Negro activities later in this Chapter. In 1920, Garvey announced to his thousands of followers in the Negro world that God was black.

[47]A similar impulse is to be found in Ralphe de Boissiere's Crown Jewel (1952) where Cassie is freed from her belief in the Orisha by the love of the labour leader LeMaitre whose movement she joins. De Boissiere's account of a Shango meeting in Chapter 36 is of great exotic as well as documentary interest.

for instance, there is a Pocomania cult in which the spectacular elements of drums, rhythm, sacrifice, flagellation and spirit possession occur. Salkey however sets the novel during a period of drought and aridity in the land. The furious manifestations are strongly declared to be related to socio-economic depression and the "great emptiness, somewhere in their life, that gnawing at them and begging for plenty-plenty satisfaction" (p.59). But Salkey goes beyond flat documentation of a special group to see the extremism of the cultists as an expression of human nature under burning stress: "/W/hen the land is dying, those whose lives are nearest to it smell of death also, and being contaminated, resent it .... Then the land becomes a mirror! No man ought to search for his reflexion in it, because if he did he would only end by resenting what he saw; and by discovering his awkward image, and so discovering his loneliness, he would hold the mirror high above his head, fling it from himself in disgust, and smash it on some unsuspecting rock. The drought brings a touch of madness to the land, a kind of rebellion, and a quality of compelling suicide which Calvary once witnessed". (p.19).

As their prayers for rain remain unanswered, the Pocomania cultists find the substance of their lives breaking up beyond their control. Dada Johnson the leader sees their faith in him collapsing. The deputy leader sees his moment to make a bid for primacy. These local motives operate in a spectacular dance (the Giant X) but Salkey reveals the universal dimensions in the situation with a tense and unobtrusive economy. Dada Johnson and his deputy equate their bodies with the land so the flagellation scene is both an attempt to banish the barrenness of the land and of their earthly bodies: "We must lash the devil out of the land. We must lash good water into the land." As their self-inflicted strokes become more incisive, both men, seeing their image in the land and in each other, are possessed of the urge to self-destruction. Finally, both collapse exhausted and expiring. The Giant X claims both as sacrificial victims. But the rains do not come. The gods are remote. Sacrifice is meaningless.

This fierce vision of human existence is placed within a more conventional ordering of experience in the novel. But although the solid virtues and values of the Marshalls and the Parkins help to disperse the distress, it is the quality of violence, the deep human aberration of the sacrificed and suicidal cultists which makes Salkey's novel a powerful work of art and an expression of timeless humanity.

A light-hearted approach to cultists is taken by O. R. Dathorne in Dumplings in the Soup (1963). Dathorne's Shakers are given a novel context - they are immigrants in England. They purchase a house in a respectable area, blacken the windows and stain the knocker a mournful black, then surprise the interested English natives by naming the house "The Lily of the Valley." The neighbours are alarmed and curious when black guests begin to assemble for what looks like being a party. "But they were not long left in doubt. Suddenly the air was full of noises - hysterical shrieks, screams and loud wailing. Then followed singing in loud unmusical tones, the clink of milk bottles and spoons, and hard heavy toes throbbing out the rhythm" (pp. 113-114). The inspired worshippers break into a slow fox-trot. In Chapter Sixteen, Dathorne makes fun of the illiteracy of Brother Collar-bone the cultist. After expounding, through the leader and chorus system, how "Moses came forth" Collar-Bone breaks up the meeting as the outrage suddenly dawns upon him: "I vex. I damn vex. Imagine a whole race going on, and a great man like Moses running, and he can only come fourth" (p.121). The effects are perhaps easily obtained but illustrate the author's attitude to the cultists. At another point in the novel "The Lily of the Valley" is described in authorial narrative as a "combined club and secret society church and semi-brothel" (p.114).

In God the Stonebreaker, (1964) the authorial voice gives an unsentimental description of a Pocomania sect who use GB's backyard for their practices:

> This group brought considerable nightly revenue to GB's shop when with their booming drums they summoned their poverty-crazed, sin-conscious adherents. By

> the light of lanterns, like human tongues of fire, the cultists danced to hymns, accompanied by the rhythmic beats of their drums. Like vermin under insecticidal attack, these frenzied people wiggled, jumped, pranced, screamed and yelled and prayed in a language incomprehensible to themselves in a ceremony they called 'trooping' with the ultimate aim of self-exhaustion. The gibberish they shouted they called 'unknown tongue' and their strange behaviour they described as being 'in the spirit'. Frequently a number of them fell to the ground where they remained in something like semi-rigor mortis, their coma lasting sometimes until morning. While some were obviously possessed with 'dancing' devils, others were the victims of infirm minds agitated by abiding penury. Many of them claimed the gift of prophecy during this state, but none of them, in their prescience, saw anything but catastrophic events bringing suffering destruction and death to those whom they must secretly envy. (God the Stonebreaker, pp. 100-101)

Obviously, Bennett has no illusions about the cultists. But their introduction into the novel is not gratuitous, nor is it for documentary purposes. It is in character that the greedy and resourceful GB should recognise and exploit the economic possibilities of leadership. GB develops "the arts of blessing people, telling fortunes, giving bush baths and 'sabotages' - her malapropism for massages" (p.101); she becomes a faith healer: "As me touch you", she councilled, 'you must tell yourself that you feel better, even if you feel worse. That is faith!'" (p.111). Soon she claims the ability to communicate with the dead, prophesy and bring down blessings or curses. When a young man steals from her shop she calls in the Powers that be: "Me is not praying to Jesus about this matter, Jesus is too merciful and forgiving. Me going to ask Massa God himself to send fire and grimestone on the wicked rascal and break his blasted neck. Stealing is the wors' sin on earth" (p.112).

Bennett uses the cultists as a means of developing and animating his trickster heroine. At the same time, this section of the novel, culminating with the brilliant episode where GB's "chief lieutenant, Brother Mospin, a rogue, alias Brother Mongoose" and out-manouevres and out-foxes his high Priestess,[48] is a well-conducted satiric exposure of leaders and leadership. Bennett's attitude to the cults is the same as Dathorne's, but Bennett's imaginative projections are more considerable.

---

[48] This episode, and others like it in the novel make God the Stone-breaker the first successful and unobtrusive recreation of the folk Anancy in West Indian writing.

Orlando Patterson's ambitious interpretation of Ras Tafarians in The Children of Sisyphus (1964) is best understood by way of contrast. J. B. Emtage makes this denigrating attack in Brown Sugar (1966): "The Rastas were the angry young men of the Island. "Back to Africa" was their cry; there only will the Negro grow to his full stature, and find his soul by turning his back on white civilisation. Extremists did not shave or cut their hair, and were not fussy about washing either. These smoked ganja (hashish), carried long knives and were much too angry to work" (p.19). Emtage's antipathy is also apparent in his statement of Rasta belief: "The Rasta Brethren formed a scattered community of many groups whose beliefs and practises varied considerable from one to another. But all regarded Haile Selassie as the Living God on Earth, and looked to Ethiopia as their Mecca. The West Indian Negroes, they said, were really the lost tribes of Israel, sold into captivity by Elizabeth I and James I, and by the pirates, Hawkins, Cecil Rhodes, Livingstone and Grant. Those Jews whom Hitler destroyed were the false Jews of whom it is written: 'Woe unto them that call themselves Israel and are not'"(p.20). Emtage's view of the Ras Tafarians occurs in a fictional work, and I do not wish to suggest that the writer ought not to realise comic possibilities in his material, but a great deal of Brown Sugar that relates to Negroes is sheer lampoon motivated by race prejudice. When Hoggy Cumberbatch, the mock-hero of the novel decides to form a Rasta colony, his motives are shown to be ruthlessly practical: "Hoggy himself had no intention of emigrating to the Dark Continent, whose nose rings and plate-distended lips he found embarrassing. But he had capital to invest ... The outlook for rum was uncertain; the future he felt lay with 'ganja' which thousands smoked religiously" (p.22).

But the objects of Emtage's derision are handled realistically and with compassion by Patterson in The Children of Sisyphus. In this novel, the socio-economic causes of Ras Tafarianism are harrowingly expressed. The progress of Sammy

the garbageman as he drives his cart to the heart of the Dungle (the dumping-ground) where the Rastas live allows Patterson to describe the shacks and huts of the slum-dwellers: "The cart moved slowly forward. The mean, derelict smell of human waste mingled with the more aristocratic stink of the factory chimneys. Towards the right of the highway several meagre cows strayed in a dry, scorching common. And on the left were the shacks: dreadful, nasty little structures - a cluster of cardboard, barrel sides, old cod-fish boxes, flattened tar drums and timber scraps. A few, the more luxurious, consisted of the carcasses of old cars" (p.23). As the cart advances Sammy sees the inhabitants moving in for the scraps he is about to dump: "Already there was one of them. Ragged thing. Black skin, scaly with exposure. Hair peeling off. Eyes yellow-brown and dark, deep and sallow, piercing. Bang-belly, bang-belly. One, two, three of them creeping from out of their little darknesses. Sagging, top-heavy head with the hair on it like black-pepper grains, peeling, peeling, peeling. And the mouths, raw and dripping with dark, rotten teeth" (p.24). The horrifying climax comes when Sammy begins to unload the debris: "Immediately they swarmed in upon him. He dug his shovel into the muck and flung it out, unmindful of which of them it fell on. It was a free-for-all. A mad, raging, screaming, laughing, angry, hungry scramble. A worlf-pack at war. Men and women and children and beasts all joined in snatching and grabbing and biting one another for any new prize they found in the barbage. Old Cassandra screamed with delight as a rotten bit of cod-fish fell upon her face. A youth plucked the beard of another and kicked him in the pit of his stomach for snatching his piece of bread and stuffing it down before he had time to get it back. 'Long-mouth Clara' too weak with consumption to enter the scramble, looked hungrily at the luscious piece of disinfected mackerel that a ragged old beard held and, catching his eyes for a moment, she pointed suggestively to the clump of sargasso beside the beach" (p.25).

But Patterson's novel intends to be more than just a socially realistic fiction. Through the consciousness of the Ras Tafarian leader, Brother Solomon, Patterson seeks to portray Rasta destitution and unavailing struggle to escape as the fate of man in an absurd world. When Brother John and Brother Ezekiel bring the news that the delegation to Ethiopia has failed and that the Rastas would not be received in the Emperor's kingdom, Brother Solomon reveals that he had known it all along but had deliberately left all the other Brethren undeceived; the deception must be maintained for as long as possible. The deceived are not just poor and wretched people:

> 'Then what else them is?' Brother John's voice broke in impatiently.
> 'They are gods. You can't see? Every wretched one of them is archetype of the clown-man, playing their part upon the comic stage so well they are no longer conscious of playing. You can't see, Brothers? Everyone of them is a living symbol full of meaning and revelation. Look! They have before them one hour, two hours, five, no twelve, before the ship come. Twelve hourse of unreality. Twelve hours of happiness. Who else but the gods could enjoy such happiness? For the moment they are conquerors. For the moment they have cheated the dreary circle. And it's only the moment that counts.'

When his audience object that, with a crowd outside about to be disillusioned, meditations on life are inappropriate, Brother Solomon continues to expound:

> 'Life,' Brother Solomon repeated, and he had half retreated from them again. 'Life, you say, Brother. You speak of the long comic repetition, don't it, Brother? But you don't fool yourself that it's only them that's tried; that have their hopes raised an' then shattered only to start again. No, Brother, no. They you see outside are just the gods that make plain by magnitude what ordinary mortals fear to face and run from. Everywhere in everything, there is the comedy you see before you now, Brother.' (The Children of Sisyphus, p.202)

The studied nature of these passages from the penultimate chapter (the doctrinal heart of the novel) and Brother Solomon's thinly concealed bearing of the authorial message illustrate the difficulties of a West Indian novelist who is intelligent enough to know that social documentation is not sufficient but whose creative inspiration is a deliberately received philosophy rather than an evolving personal vision. For while Patterson's avowedly inherited doctrine is not

inapplicable to the life depicted in his fiction, the obtrusive manner in which the interpretation is given makes it seem unnatural. This is not the case in Roger Mais' The Hills Were Joyful Together for instance, where the technique is just as clumsy but where one's sense of the author's deeply felt intuitions about life seeking to express themselves prevents the declared philosophy from seeming to be intellectually imposed. But although The Children of Sisyphus does not succeed, Patterson's handling of his cultist raw material represents an ambitious and interesting attempt to translate social reality into some of its possibilities by fictional means.

Acculturation and Devaluation

I have been trying to argue on the sociological level that African cultural survivals in pure form are hard to come by in the West Indies. And in looking at certain fictional works I hoped to show the relevance of this sociological information as helpful background. But it is necessary to insist that the fictional appearances of "Africanisms" do not justify us in concluding that the West Indies is an area of African culture. A Ghanaian social philosopher makes the point from another angle: "The West Indies, where the acculturation into Europe has gone very far will ... find very little to pose against the European cultures now or at independence. The West Indies are western and might do well to accelerate the process of Westernisation as the only really practical alternative given to them."[49] There are more psychological tensions involved in the acculturative process than Abrahams seems to have been aware of. The African cultures in the West Indies did not diminish and alter simply in the sense that transported cultures change. In the New World, slavery defined the initial accommodation between the Negro and the White man, "the white rulers having the highest status and their culture the greatest prestige. Things African were

---

[49] W. E. Abraham The Mind of Africa (1962) p.133

correspondingly devalued, including African racial traits."[50] In the slave context this showed itself in the superiority feelings of the island-born (i.e. Creole) slaves over the newly-arrived (African) slaves: "They hold the Africans in utmost contempt, stiling them 'salt-water Negroes' and 'Guiney birds'; but value themselves on their own pedigree, which is reckoned the more honourable, the further it removes from an African, or transmarine ancestor. On every well-governed plantation they eye and respect their master as a father, and are extremely vain in reflecting on the connexion between them."[51] To the circumstances of slavery can also be traced the colour scale, degree of whiteness corresponding with social status, which still operates in many areas of West Indian life: "My black page, Cubina, is married: I told him that I hoped he had married a pretty woman; why had he not married Mary Wiggins? He seemed quite shocked at the very idea. "Oh, massa, me black, Mary Wiggins samba; that not allowed."[52]

The New World Negro's acculturation into Europe was hastened by racial and historical blackmail on a larger front than was implicit in the slave situation. The devaluation of Africa and things African described emotively by Fanon ("By a kind of perverted logic it [colonialism] turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it") is analysed with lucid scholarship in Philip Curtin's invaluable The Image of Africa (1965): "In its early stages, with little background in conscious or rationalised theory, British consideration of of African race and African culture was highly dispersed. It was not a central problem discussed as such but a peripheral question that had to be taken into account by several groups of writers. 'The Negro's place in nature' naturally had

---

[50] M. G. Smith "West Indian Culture" in Caribbean Quarterly, Vol. 7 No. 3, Dec. 1961 published by the Extra-Mural Department, University of the West Indies.

[51] Long The History of Jamaica (1774) Vol. 2, Bk. III, Chapter III p.410.

[52] M. G. Lewis Journal of a West India Proprietor (1834) p.79

a role in whatever reporting came from Africa or the West Indies. It was discussed from another point of view by biologists, who were just then concerned with the problem of explaining human varieties. In quite another context men of letters used the convention of the 'noble savage' for their own purposes. Finally the anti-slavery writers of a dominantly Christian and humanitarian turn of mind were forced into a discussion of race by their efforts to reform imperial policy."[53] Of the four factors mentioned, the one that had the most devastating effect on Negro morals since it gave a pseudo-scientific basis to race prejudice, was the attempt to classify human varieties, Curtin isolates Edward Long's section on the Negro in The History of Jamaica as a crucial document because as a resident of Jamaica Long was in a position to bring forward 'evidence'; although this evidence was nothing more than the common prejudice of the West Indies, Long gave it the backing of technical biological arguments: "Long's greatest importance was in giving an 'empirical' and 'scientific' base that would lead on to pseudo-scientific racism. The part of The History of Jamaica dealing with race was reprinted in America in the Columbia Magazine of 1788, where it became a support for later American racism. It was used again and again for three-quarters of a century by British and Continental polygenists of scientific repute, and it provided a set of ready made arguments for any publicist who wanted to prove the 'fact' of African inferiority."[54] It is within an objective seeming account in which the 'genus homo' is divided into Europeans and other people, Negroes, and 'orang-outangs' that Long makes a number of highly offensive remarks about Negroes. To review these declarations is to encompass in a little space the history and characteristic pattern of over three hundred years of denigration of the African peoples.

Long begins with the physical qualities of Negroes. A dark membrane communicates that black colour to their skins. They have "a covering of wool,

---

[53] The Image of Africa p. 34

[54] The Image of Africa, p. 45

like the bestial fleece, instead of hair." Long then particularises "the roundness of their eyes, the figure of their ears, tumid nostrils, flat noses, invariable thick lips and the general large size of the female nipples, as if adapted by nature to the peculiar conformations of their children's mouths." Continuing the description of his sub-human species, Long speaks of the black colour of the "lice which infect their bodies" and "their fetid smell which they all have in a greater or less degree."[55]

Directly connected with these physical differences from homo sapiens is, according to Long, "a disparity in regard to the faculties of the mind." With a show of objectivity, Long reports on the technology of one or two African states to conclude that "in general they are void of genius and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science".

Not content with his case against the African present, the historian turns to their past. Greek and Roman authors had given them a "most odious and despicable character". Indeed, argues Long, we have no information concerning "whatever great personages this country might anciently have produced". What is certain, the author triumphantly adds, is that "they are now everywhere degenerated into a brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful and superstitious people."

These views are so obviously nonsense that it is difficult for us to imagine that they were taken seriously. But we need to remind ourselves that they still form the basis of popular attitudes to the Negro in British and American societies. And in Long's day they were sanctioned by what was regarded as science. Two other features in Long's account - the appeal to authority, and 'evidence' from personal knowledge - complete the appearance of inevitable truth. Long can allow

---

[55]Long's "remarks upon the Negroes in general found on that part of the African continent called Guiney or Negro-land" occur in Vol. II, Book Three, Chapter 1, pp. 351-383. Quotations not numbered are taken from this Chapter.

himself the luxury of assumed regret: "for the honour of human nature it were to be wished that these descriptions could with justice be accused of exaggeration; but in respect to the modern Africans, we find the charge corroborated and supported by a consistent testimony of so many different nations who have visited the coast that it is difficult to believe they have all been guilty of misrepresenting these people; more especially as they tally exactly with the character of the Africans that are brought into our plantations. This brutality sometimes diminishes when they are imported young after they have become habituated to cloathing and a regular discipline of life; but many are never reclaimed, and continue savages in every sense of the word, to their latest period."

I shall try below to show how various Pan-African and Pan-Negro movements in politics and in literature are related to the devaluation of Africa and the Africans. But I would like first to glance briefly at its shattering effect on the earliest West Indian Negro writer. This is a pretentious claim to make for Francis Williams on the basis of only one surviving poem in Latin which can with certainty be attributed to him, but my main purpose is to describe a condition to which modern West Indian writers have made responses on a fairly large scale.

The Case of Francis Williams

The only published source of information about Francis Williams is Long's The History of Jamaica. After an extended account of Negroes in general, Long devotes all of Chapter 4 Book 3[56] to the youngest of the three sons born to John and Dorothy Williams, free Negroes in eighteenth century Jamaica. Long gives no dates, but he provides a translation of Williams' ode "To/That most upright and valiant Man,/ GEORGE HALDANE, Esq.;/ Governor of the Island of Jamaica;/ Upon whom/ All military and moral Endowments are accumulated." Haldane was appointed governor in 1759 and the ode was written to honour him on his arrival, so it may be dated as around 1759.

---

[56]Unnumbered quotations in this section are all taken from Chapter 4.

Long reports almost gleefully that Haldane died within months of receiving the address.

Francis, a boy of unusual lively parts, was the subject of an experiment made by the Duke of Montagu "in order to discover whether by proper cultivation, and a regular course of tuition at school and at the university, a Negroe might not be found as capable of literature as a white person". The subject of the experiment was therefore given a regular discipline of classic instruction at a grammar school in England, and then at the University of Cambridge "under the ablest preceptors, and made some progress in the mathematics". Long's assertion that Mr. Trelawny, the governor at that time, objected to Williams becoming a privy seal or one of the governor's council gives us an early example of the odds against the black professional in West Indian society, a prejudice which has only recently begun to disappear. Since Trelawny was governor from 1738 to 1752 we can deduce that Williams had graduated and returned to Jamaica by 1752 at the latest.

Denied a place in public life, Francis Williams opened a school in Spanish Town where he taught "reading, writing, Latin and the elements of the mathematics." Long takes delight in retailing a story of how a special pupil of Williams' had his brain turned by too much learning, "an unfortunate example to show that every African head is not adapted by nature to such profound contemplations."

That Montagu should have carried out the experiment that he did is evidence of the currency of the notion that the Negro was an inferior being. Williams' inability to find a place in public life was only a sign of the pressures to which the Negro was subjected. Although Long is a patently biased reporter, his account of Williams' general character and bearing sounds too much like a description of the West Indian Black and Coloured middle class of the twentieth century to have been totally invented. Williams was "haughty, opinionated, looked down with sovereign on his fellow Blacks, entertained the highest opinion of his own knowledge,

treated his parents with much disdain and behaved towards his children and his slaves with a severity bordering upon cruelty; he was fond of having great deference paid to him and exacted it in the utmost degree from the Negroes about him; he affected a singularity of dress and particularly grave case of countenance to impress an idea of his wisdom and learning; and to second this view, he wore in common a huge wig, which made a very venerable figure." Even taking Long's violent race prejudice into account, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that Williams was a very insecure man.

It is in this light, not as a proof of vanity as Long charges that we have to view the dedicating of the Ode to the governor. The bard's conventional declaration of his unfitness to sing the deeds of such a mighty hero becomes with Williams a plea for human equality:

> Yet may you deign accept this humble song,
> Tho' wrapt in gloom, and from a falt'ring tongue;
> Tho' dark the stream on which the tribute flows,
> Not from the skin but from the heart it rose.
> To all of humankind, benignant heaven
> (Since nought forbids) one common soul has given.
> This rule was 'stablish'd by the' Eternal Mind;
> Nor virtue's self, nor prudence are confin'd
> To colour; none imbues the honest heart;
> To science none belongs, andnone to art.

But Williams cannot believe this argument. The weight of his blackness hangs heavy. He urges his muse "of blackest tint". to approach with confidence

> Nor blush, altho' in garb funereal drest,
> Thy body's white, tho' clad in sable vest.

Williams then argues that the graces of civilisation "shall best the sooty African adorn". Wisdom, patriotism and virtue "shall lift the poet's name". His having been born in Jamaica has made it possible for him to avoid the worst of racial identities:

> An heart with wisdom fraught, a patriot flame,
> A love of virtue; these shall lift his name
> Conspicuous, far beyond his kindred race,
> Distinguish'd from them by the foremost place.
> In this prolific isle I drew by birth,
> And Britain nurs'd ...

Beneath the polite surface of Williams' poem is a deep alienation from self and race whose symptoms are explicit both in Long's reporting of his general behaviour, and in the allegation that Williams used to describe himself as "a white man acting under a black skin", and had tried to prove logically that a Negroe was superior in quality to a mulatto or other caste. With Emancipation and with movements towards Negro majority rule and independence in the islands in the twentieth century, the inner and outer tensions exhibited in the case of Francis Williams were to take other forms. While Williams was apologetic about his blackness, insisted on his non-African birth and sought to ape the White man's civilisation, twentieth century Negroes have done the precise opposite. I would like to look at some of the shaping movements in this revolution.

Pan African and Pan Negro Movements in the Twentieth Century

The first point to be made is that we are dealing with a series of disconnected movements with different emphases, occurring in different forms in the Caribbean and in North America. Mutual influences cannot be entirely ruled out, but what is impressive about these movements is the way they spontaneously coalesce around a common interest in Africa, and how in each case, the interest in Africa was either a phase of or a complement to more immediate issues. Essentially, the interest in Africa arose because New World Negroes were not at ease in societies to which they belonged but in which they were at the qualid bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Their unease was contributed to by the fact that their country of origin had been branded a land of superstition and savagery. Even when political power seemed to be coming into their hands the descendants of Africa could not escape the consequences of their "tainted origin", of which, by a circular logic, their recent enslavement and their socio-economic depression were taken as both proof and result.

Haitian Nationalism

The rehabilitation of Africa and the celebration of it as a cultural matrix began in independent Haiti, around the 1850's but became more intense in the early decades of the twentieth century. Haiti had become independent in 1804, but French culture continued to be the model for the Haitian elite. In the meantime, the life of the peasant masses remained of identifiably African derivation. Although "the idea that independent 'black' Haiti had the historical mission of demonstrating to the world the capacity for 'civilisation' ... of a coloured people of African descent was not slow in making its appearance",[57] it was not until the shock of American occupation in 1915 that Haitian intellectuals, looking for a rallying point, turned to the life of the folk: "We have no chance of being ourselves unless we repudiate no part of our ancestral heritage. And indeed this heritage for eight-tenths of us is a gift from Africa." Jean Price-Mars' words define the trend in a nutshell. In Ainsi Parla L'Oncle (1928) from which the quotation[58] comes, Price Mars directed writers' attention to the life of the folk as suitable material for literature. Analysing the civilisations of Africa, he sought to restore racial pride by pointing out that while a magnificent civilisation flourished on the banks of the Nile, Europe was a land of miserable savages. The men of letters were not backward. As Coulthard puts it: "From this point onwards the drums start to beat in the literature of Haiti." But however strange the noises, what emerges clearly from Coulthard's documentation of the case of Haiti is that the embrace of Africa was a self-conscious phase in the development of a Haitian national consciousness.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association

Another movement interested in Africa was Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association which was at its peak in the early 1920's. The

---

57G. R. Coulthard Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature (1962) p.62.
58Cited in Coulthard, p.64. Price-Mars' book was published in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

association had been founded in Jamaica in 1914[59] where it appealed to the masses but was held in disdain by respectable and would-be respectable Negroes. Although the death of Booker I. Washington put an end to one of Garvey's hopes, (to obtain aid from the founder of the Tuskegee institute in establishing educational facilities for Jamaican Negroes) the wish to set up U.N.I.A. branches among American Negroes was enough to take the Jamaican to the United States in 1916. It was from a base in Harlem that Garvey became the first Negro leader with an international following, and the first man to organise a mass movement among American Negroes: "He was the modern Moses, the black saviour. His message reached Negroes everywhere. From the plantation of the deep South, they hearkened to his voice, in the islands of the Caribbean they were moved as never before .... Across the Atlantic in the heart of the Congo, Negroes talked of the black Messiah."[60] Garvey appealed on every front. His programme was a mixed one: Africa for the Africans; Renaissance of the Negro race; Negro economic self-sufficiency but Back to Africa for those who wished; a Black Star Line of ships owned, manned and patronised by Negroes - to be used for Repatriation, or for Negro trade. Garvey's basic proposition, passionately enunciated again and again. was that Africa had been great once and would be great again. This was to be the U.N.I.A. faith. Its work was to be found in the vanguard of the struggle to tear off the shackles that bind Mother Africa. Then, a strong and free Africa would open its doors to her children and give prestige and protection to the wandering ones

---

[59] A good factual account of Garvey's career is E. D. Cronon's Black Moses (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1955) upon which I have drawn. Cronon provides a very useful bibliography.

[60] Claude McKay 'Marcus Aurelius Garvey' in Harlem: Negro Metropolis (N.Y. 1940). McKay's account is written out of personal knowledge and some involvement with his fellow-Jamaican. George Padmore's essay 'Black Zionian or Garveyism' in Pan-Africanism or Communism? (1956), is another valuable West Indian assessment.

everywhere. Garvey was not a madman. But he was rash and incompetent, creating enemies by arrogance, and evoking jealousy by his success, among influential Blacks and Coloureds. The proposed colony in Liberia was circumvented by American capitalism, and his attempt to sell through the post shares in the failing Black Star Line was used by the United States government to convict him of fraud. As a convicted alien, Garvey was deported from the United States in 1927. From this point the movement began to decline.

Garvey's achievement, however, is to be measured not by the life of his Association but by its psychological impact. In his speeches and in the pages of his low-priced and tri-lingual weekly the 'Negro World' (1918-1933) he inspired Negroes everywhere by teaching them about the regal splendours of ancient Africa and the achievements of distinguished Africans and African civilisations when Europe was in utter savagery; he taught the glory of Toussaint and the heroism of the leaders of slave rebellions; and he told about the mighty struggles of Zulu and Hottentot warriors against European rule. Garvey's appeal to the racial consciousness of his people culminated with his proclamation in 1920 that the Deity was black; thousands of paintings of the Black Christ and Black Virgin were distributed to the members of his African Orthodox Church. Whatever his deficiencies as a practical leader and in spite of his ignorance of Africa Garvey gave dignity and purpose to his followers, teaching them to exult in their Blackness and their restored African past.

Pan Africanism

Less racial in its appeal but just as interested in Africa was the movement called Pan-Africanism. The first Pan-African conference was sponsored by the Trinidad barrister, Henry Sylvester-Williams in 1900. Sylvester-Williams had for some years been acting as legal adviser to several African chiefs and native dignataries on political missions to the Colonial Office. "To combat the aggressive policies of British imperialists, Mr. Sylvester-Williams took the initiative in convening a Pan-African

conference in London in 1900, as a forum of protest against the aggression of white colonizers and at the same time, to make an appeal to the missionary and abolitionist traditions of the British people to protect the Africans from the depredations of the Empire builders."[61] Whatever other overtones Pan-Africanism was to take on later, always in its programme was a clear political committment to the achievement of African independence. The delegates at Sylvester-Williams' conference included Negroes from Africa, the West Indies and North America. The character of a club of intellectuals from Africa, the Caribbean and North America was to be the second distinguishing feature of the Pan-Africanist movement. After the First World War, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois was to revive Pan-Africanism. Between 1919 and 1927, DuBois organised four international Congresses in which a concern for African independence, the welfare of darker races of man in Asia, Africa and the Americas, and for inter-racial harmony were central motifs. At the end of the Second World War, the centre for Pan-Africanist ideas shifts unmistakably to Britain. The historic Fifth Congress held in Manchester in 1945 was virtually a conference of future heads of African states. When the conference ended, men like Nkrumah and Kenyatta returned home to implement its programmes for achieving self-government. But although the emphasis of the Congress was on African affairs, its closing declaration to the Colonial powers was a manifesto from all Negroes: "We are determined to be free. We want education. We want the right to earn a decent living; the right to express our thoughts and emotions, to adopt and create forms of beauty." The Congress, moreover, had been largely organised by the West Indians Dr. Peter Millard, George Padmore and C. L. R. James.

It is not always easy to understand why men like James and Padmore did not enter political life in the islands. But the West Indian involvement in

---

[61] George Padmore Pan-Africanism or Communism? (1956) p.117. Pages 105-185 provide the most reliable guide to the understanding of Pan-Africanism by one of its leading exponents. Colin Legum's Pan Africanism (1962) contains useful information but is highly misleading in its interpretations of this political movement.

Pan-Africanism was not simply a sign of political frustration at home. The doings from Sylvester-Williams to Padmore "the Father of African Emancipation" were an expression of the need to remove the stigma of being of African origin, as a pre-condition of West Indian nationalism.

The three social and political movements I have described coincided with the beginnings of more disciplined approaches by Europeans to African cultures and African history. At the same time, in the arts the cult of the primitive enjoyed a period of intense popularity: Picasso and African sculpture, Stravinsky and rag music, and Eugene O'Neill's Emperor Jones (1921) summarise the fashion. But essentially this was part of a reaction to Western civilisation. Disillusion with the Great War, the failure of the industrial age, and Freud's theories of the repression of primordial instincts spelled out Lawrence's novels and Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West (1926). The primitive Negro was a way out. The relationships between these various African orientations are still to be examined but it can at least be supposed that there were mutual influences. I shall concentrate on the three in which Negroes and Africans were clearly involved.

These movements were accompanied by literary manifestations which they seem to have inspired. In Haiti, as I have already implied, connection was direct. Three years after his sharp dismissal of Garvey as a "West Indian charlatan",[62] Claude McKay in a more reflective mood connected his Jamaican country-man's activities with the Negro literary upsurge of the 1920's: "The flowering of Harlem's creative life came in the Garvey era. The anthology, The New Negro, which orientated the debut of the Renaissance writers, was printed in 1925. If Marcus Garvey did not originate the phrase, 'New Negro', he at least made it popular."[63] And the more politically involved Pan-Africanists like

---

[62] Claude McKay A Long Way from Home (N.Y., 1937) p.354

[63] Claude McKay "Marcus Aurelius Garvey" in Harlem: Negro Metropolis (N.Y., 1940), p.177.

James and Padmore produced non-fiction works celebrating the slave-revolutionaries.[64]

The relationship between the broad movements described and the literary manifestations that occurred simultaneously cannot be made into one of cause and effect. And just as the broad social movements had common features so the literary manifestations seem to share certain programmatic features: a celebration of Africa as a cultural matrix; a favourable interpretation of the African past; a pride in Blackness; a contrast between a harmonious African way of life and a decadent White civilisation lost in materialism; related to these are theories about the integrated African or Negro personality. It is useful to continue using the word "Negritude" to describe this complex of facts, attitudes and myths in works of literature. The connections between Haitian nationalism, Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and Negritude can in this way be seen in their overlapping ideas and emotions but more fundamentally as relating to the same historical necessity. But Negritude has a more spectacular history than any of the other movements. It has been discussed as a kind of Orphic literature, an attempt to discover something called "the Black soul" by Jean-Paul Sartre;[65] and it has been

---

[64]See George Padmore The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers (1931). James published the exceptional The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (1938). Historically sound, the work is nevertheless a highly imaginative and intensely felt study of the great Negro revolutionary's complex life and personality. In 1938 also, James published a monograph History of Negro Revolt in the series called "Fact" whose general editor was Raymond Postgate.

N. E. Cameron's valuable The Evolution of the Negro, two volumes, (Guyana 1929, 1934) should be mentioned here, although the Guyanese does not seem to have been connected in a specific way with any of the movements I have described.

[65]See the introduction to Leopold Sedhar Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malagache, Paris (1948). Sartre's introduction has been published separately in an English translation Black Orpheus, tr. S. W. Allen, (Presence Africaine, Paris n.d.).

seen in the context of "African philosophy" by Jahnheinz Jahn.[66] With less pretension but similar a-historicity it is generally regarded as the qualities of Negro literature. It is tempting to add one's own bit to this confusion by saying that Negritude is Black Romanticism. But it seems better to begin, with Coulthard[67] and C. L. R. James, by pointing out that Negritude originated in the Caribbean. Coulthard writes of its French West Indian background in Haiti, and James in an acute appendix to a recent edition of The Black Jacobins[68] after stating that Garvey and Padmore wrote with the ink of Negritude goes on to declare of Garvey: "Garvey found the cause of Africans and of people of African descent not so much neglected as unworthy of consideration. In little more than half of ten years he had made it a part of the political consciousness of the world. He did not know the word Negritude but he knew the thing. With enthusiasm he would have welcomed the nomenclature, with justice claimed paternity." Instead of tracing one paternity, however, it seems preferable to recognise Negritude's derivation from several sources, described above. And in order to avoid confusion it is worth persisting with the term as a blanket one for literary phenomena. This will facilitate the task of tracing Negritude's complicated progress from the Caribbean to Africa, and back via Europe. The best place to start is with Aime Cesaire's Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal[69](1934). In this poem by a Martiniquan the word "Negritude" first appears. Let us examine the context in which it appears and see what Cesaire meant by it.

---

[66] In Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture (1958).

[67] See 'The French West Indian Background of Negritude' in Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature (1962).

[68] 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro' in The Black Jacobins, (Vintage Books, Random House Inc., August, 1963).

[69] First published in the Paris magazine 'Volonies' in 1939. Second edition, Paris, 1947. A text advertised as the "definitive edition" was published by Presence Africaine in Paris, 1956.

Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal: a poetic vision

The Cahier begins with a pained and bitter vision at dawn of the utter desolation of a town and people void of life in the scabrous Antilles:

> Dans cette ville inerte, cette foule désolée sous le soleil, ne participant à rien de ce qui s'exprime, s'affirme, se libère au grand jour de cette terre sienne ...
> Au bout du petit matin, cette ville inerte et ses au-delà de lèpres, de consomption, de famines, de peurs tapies dans les ravins, de pours juchées dans les arbres, de peurs creusées dans le sol, de peur en dérive dans le ciel, de pours amoncelées et ses fumerolles d'angoisse (pp. 28-29)[70]

There is implicit protest in Cesaire's depressingly realistic picture of colonial Martinique. But in the Cahier, we do not hear the melodramatic voice of righteous indignation "car la vie n'est pas un spectacle, car une mer de douleurs n'est pas un proscenium" (p.42). We hear the more moving accents of universal deprivation and longing:

> ... Partir ... j'arriverais lisse et jeune dans ce pays mien et je dirais à ce pays dont le limon entre dans la composition de ma chair: 'Jai lontemps erré et je reviens vers la hideur désertée de vos plaies.'
> Je viendrais à ce pays mien et je lui dirais. 'Embrassez-moi sans crainte ... Et si je ne sais que parler, c'est pour vous que je parlerai' (p.41).

At the lowest ebb of disillusion and despair ("chaude election de cendres, de ruines et d'affaisements" p.43). the spirit revises and the poet begins to feel himself borne up by his participation in the race dispersed throughout the world:

> pas un bout de ce monde qui ne porte mon empreinte digitale
> et mon culcanéum sur le dos des gratte-ciel et me crasse
> dans le scintillement des gemmes!

But it is in the image of Toussaint L'Ouverture in his snow-bound prison in the Jura, a symbol at once of Negro glory and of the ultimate constriction of the Black man in a White world, that the poet objectifies his sense of dereliction. And it is the memory of Toussaint which sharpens his own defiance:

> Ce qui est à moi aussi: une petite
> cellule dans le Jura,
> une petite cellule, la neige la double de

---

[70]This and subsequent page references are to Aime Cesaire Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal. (Presence Africaine, Paris 1956) the 2nd edition with a preface by Petar Guberina. The quotations are extensive because the Cahier is a famous but un-read poem.

barreaux blancs
la neige est un geôlier blanc qui monte
la garde devant une prison
Ce qui est a moi
c'est un homme seul emprisonné de
blanc
c'est un homme seul qui défie les cris
blancs de la mort blanche
(Toussaint, Toussaint/Louverture (pp.45-46)

From this point, Cesaire is inspired. The world in which Toussaint's glory and the glory of the race cannot shine is a world whose ways of looking are utterly distorted. Its reason is to be despised, and all its judgments and values to be turned upside down. The poet now plunges into what looks like an orgy of self-abasement, accepting as virtues, however, all that the White world has deemed vices:

je déclare mes crimes et qu'il n'y a rien à dire pour ma défense.
Danses. Idoles. Relaps. Moi aussi

J'ai assassiné Dieu de ma paresse de
mes paroles de mes gestes de mes chansons obscènes

J'ai porté des plumes de perroquet des
dépouilles de chat musqué
J'ai lassé la patience des missionaires
insulté les beinfaiteurs de l'humanité
Défié Tyr. Défié Sidon.
Adoré le Zambèze.
L' étendue de ma perversité me confond! (p.50)

Recounting the long history of suffering of his race, and glorying "perversely" in its humiliation the poet suddenly discovers in the Negro's non-participation in the European conquest of nature and other peoples a positive that is in danger of going out of the world:

Mais quel étrange orgueil tout soudain m'illumine? (p.69)
.....
O lumière amicale
O fraiche source de la lumiere (70)
Eia pour ceux qui m'ont jamais rien inventé
pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien exploré
pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien dompté
mais ils s'abandonment, saisis, à l' essence de toute chose
ignorants des surfaces mais saisis par le mouvement de toute chose
insoucieux de dompter, mais jouant le jeu du monde (pp. 71-72)

It is here that Cesaire discovers at last the essence of his and the Negro's being. What the Romantic poets called variously "wise passiveness" or "negative capability",[71] Cesaire calls 'Negritude'. Like the Romantics, Cesaire contrasts this quality with cold reason:

> ma négritude n'est pas une pierre ....
> ma négritude n'est pas une taie d' eau morte sur l'oeil mort de la terre
> ma négritude n'est ni une tour ni une cathedrale
>
> elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol
> elle plonge dans chair ardente du ciel (p.71)

Endowed thus with receptivity, and one-ness with the natural forces the Negro can embrace the other elements of his Negritude - physique, history and country of origin. Although these are only the outward signs of his Negritude, they have now become acceptable. I accept the wretchedness of my island, he declares

> Et mon originale géographie aussi; la carte du monde faite à mon usage, non pas teinte aux arbitraires couleurs des savants, mais à la géométrie de mon sang répandu, j'accepte
>
> et la détermination de ma biologie, non prisonnière d'un angle facial, d'une forme de cheveux, d'un nez suffisamment aplati, d'un teint suffisament mélanien, et la négritude, non plus un indice céphalique, ou un plasma, ou un soma, mais mesurée au compas de la souffrance. (p.81)

My main purpose in dealing with the Cahier is exposition. But I think the outline given above can bear out the contention that the Negritude which is proclaimed in the poem is dramatically achieved, that it has a credible logic

---

[71] See, for example, Keats' letters to Benjamin Bailey of Nov. 22, 1817 and to G. and T. Keats of Dec. 22, 1817. In the former we read: "In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my humility and capability of submission and that is this truth - Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect but they have not any individuality, any determined Character." In the second letter he speaks of "Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason ..." Finally in a letter to Richard Woodhouse of Oct. 27, 1818, Keats writes of the "poetical Character": "It is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no Character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated ...".

within the world of the poem. If this is accepted, then it follows that the social grievances revealed, and the racial polemics which occur exist not for themselves as a form of authorial self-indulgence but as elements in a dramatic structure. It remains now to continue the exposition to show how Cesaire's vindication of the race is not a sign of implacable resentment as Sartre argues.[72] Dedicating himself as the lover and the trustee of this special race, the poet urges, "let me be the agent of mighty works" in its name:

> Mais les faisant, mon coeur, préservez-moi de toute haine
> ne faites point de moi cet homme de haine pour qui je n'ai que haine
> car pour me cantonner en cette unique race
> vous savez pourtant mon amour tyrannique
> vous savez que c'est point par haine des autres races
> que je m'exige bêcheur de cette unique race
> que ce que je veux
> c'est pour la faim universelle
> pour la soif universelle (pp. 74-75)

Cesaire does indeed find it necessary to vindicate the despised African peoples and proclaim them unique. But the Cahier is essentially a claim for a recognition of the Negro's humanity. At the end of the poem the Negro has been triumphantly discovered: "Et nous sommes debout maintenant, mon pays et moi, les cheveux dans le vent, ma main petite maintenant dans son poing enorme ..." The work of man, however, is not finished:

> mais l'oeuvre de l'homme vient seulement de commencer
> et il reste à l'homme à conquérir toute interdiction immobilisée
> aux coins de sa ferveur
> et aucune race ne possède le monopole de la beauté, de l'intelligence de
> la force (p.83)

All men can contribute to re-making the world, for it is man's prerogative:

> et il est place pour tous au rendez-vous de la conquête et nous savons
> maintenant que le soleil tourne autour de notre terre éclairant la parcelle
> qu's fixée notre volonté seule et que toute étoile chute de ciel en terre
> à notre commandement sans limite. (p.83)

It is on this note of reconciliation and universal vision that Cesaire's dignified poem ends. Before looking at the way in which it connects with theories of

---

[72] Jean-Paul Sartre Black Orpheus (Paris: Presence Africaine n.d.) p.37.

"the African personality" I would like to look at what Negritude is made up of in some works by West Indian writers.

Some Negritude Features in West Indian Writing

There is an element of nonsense in speaking about Negritude in West Indian writing. It is probably better to speak about attitudes to Africa and Africans. For by the time that most West Indian works come to be written (after 1950) social and political developments have robbed Negritude of much of its urgency on a practical level. The movement has also become international and changed in character: Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malagache was published in 1947 with Sartre's introduction to "this world of ebony" and with Senghor's declaration that "the negritude of a poem is less the theme than the style, the emotional fervor which gives life to the words, which converts the words in speech." In the West Indies itself the consciousness of race and of Africa has been awakened by the movements of the proceding decades, and the nationalist spirit is stirring. The interest now is in the Negro in the Caribbean, but there is an implicit racial appeal in the socio-economic and political persuasions. In literary works, a celebration of the local and a vein of social protest coincide with some of the programmatic features extractable from Cesaire's poem - the poverty, exploitation and devaluation of the Negro; an access to racial pride and a critique of White civilisation. Strictly speaking, these variously inspired postures are not Negritude as Cesaire proclaimed it, only its outward crust. Fortunately, few West Indian novels set up as Negritude ones in these terms. But I want to illustrate the attitudes from a few poems and two novels because it is necessary to take every kind of thing which has been called 'Negritude" into account if we are to understand its complicated history. The poems themselves have very slight literary merit but I shall try to salvage what I can.

In H. M. Telemaque's "Little Black Boy"[73] Negritude amounts to little more than pleasure in using the word "black". It occurs in four of the poem's sixteen lines, at the beginning of each stanza: "Sprightly little black boy", "Hello little black boy", "Laughing little black boy" and "Ah sweet little black boy". "Blackness" is one aspect of a tendency to celebrate or admire the Negro physique. A novelistic illustration that is less deplorable comes from John Hearne's Voices Under the Window (1955) where one character turns from the "big squarely-curved hips rising and falling alternately to the movements of her round, beautiful straight legs" of one woman to "the black and slim-boned face" of another "with the curved, Arab nose and the big generous Negro mouth; the fine curved body and the coarse straightened, Negro hair fitting around the skull like a stiff helmet of lacquered, blue-black wire" (p.23).

While in the Cahier, Cesaire's blistering evocation of poverty and degradation leads to a process of inner discovery, in some West Indian poems social protest is simply associated with racial origin. In 'I am the Archipelage' E. M. Roach states the position: "My language, history and my names are dead/And buried with my tribal soul. And now/I drown in the groundswell of poverty/No love will quell. I am the shanty town,/Banana, sugar cane and cotton man". For a moment in the manifesto one is almost lifted out of the facts: "The obeah man infects me to my heart/Although I wear my Jesus on my breast/And burn a holy candle for my saint./I am a shaker and a shouter and a myal man;/My voodoo passion swings sweet chariots low." But in the poem this is neither an expression of conflict nor a prelude to exploring the irrational as in Cesaire. Roach returns to the obsessive protest "My manhood died on the imperial wheels/That bound and ground too many generations".[74]

---

[73] In Kykoveral No. 22 Anthology of West Indian Poetry ed. A. J. Seymour, (Guyana 1957) p. 83.

[74] In Anthology of West Indian Poetry pp. 56-57.

Protest runs to anti-White or anti-European polemics in Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962). In a flash-back about the slave Cato Randall and his master we hear of the white man having "observed the smooth black of Cato's skin, the big, gentle, liquid eyes of a wild beast, the tiny pointed ears, the rows of perfect teeth, the delicate limbs moulded by some ancient civilisation that had refined itself out of existence" (p.82). Cato's master, it is suggested, became homosexually involved with Cato, the one decadent civilisation devouring the finest fruit of the other. But it is in the case of Reverend Brooke the White missionary that the contrast between impotent White and vital Black is most credely stated. Of Rev. and Mrs. Brooke we learn: "Their repeated failure at coition left them convinced that they were of the spirit; and at nights when the moon cast big blue shadows in the room they were glad that it left them unmoved, that they had been able to give up the desperate fumbling with each other's bodies which left them miserable, degraded and unsatisfied" (p.124). This information is quite gratuitous in the novel, and the reader's suspicion that Miss Wynter is simply indulging her Negritude points becomes a certainty later in the novel when Reverend Brooke brushes against the "bare arm, ... cool and soft as silk" of the chamber-maid, and his impotence begins to disappear. He orders the girl to undress, and lie down. "Her body was like a blaze of sunlight in dark room. Gently, wonderingly, he stroken her breasts, and felt his impotence of years, disguised as chastity, his terror of the flesh ... tumbling down like the walls of Jericho in one overwhelming instant. He flung off his clothes impatiently" (pp.177-178). It is not only that this whole incident is gratuitious in the novel, it is too palpably contrived. The language is sensational in the most predictable way, and the grotesqueness of the gestures is matched by the totally inappropriate image of impotence tumbling down like the walls of Jericho. Although Miss Wynter means to be taken seriously, the reader may find it difficult to do so.

In a more familiar tradition is P. M. Sherlock's 'Jamaican Fisherman'.[74] For a moment we are in the land of Resolution and Independence: "He stood beside the old canoe which lay/Upon the beach; swept up within his arms/The broken nets and careless lounged away/Towards his wretched hut .../Nor knew how fiercely spoke his body then/Of ancient wealth and savage regal men." But the limiting impulse behind Sherlock's sub-Wordsworthian vision is the notion of the ancient kingdoms of Africa. The "splendid body" of the poor fisherman among his "broken things" cries "Its proud descent from ancient chiefs and kings"; and his "black body in the sun's white light" evokes "The velvet coolness of dark forests wide,/The blackness of the jungle's starless night."

The 'Negro' poems in Section III of George Campbell's First Poems (Jamaica, 1945) contain political protest ('Negro Aroused' p.28) ('I was Negro: mechanical beast of burden') and glory in Negro blackness and physique. In 'Lost Queries' (pp. 29-30.) an apparently dying Negro asks questions and receives glorious answers: "Say, is my skin beautiful? -/Soft as velvet/As deep as the blackness of a weeping night./ And my teeth?/like ivory tusks,/As white as the sea foam that catches light./

These poems contain very little to interest us as poetry but they illustrate the thinness of the line between social and racial protest. Campbell's romanticism generates at least five good lines in 'Mother' where the 'I' of the poem comes upon a woman bathing in a river with her child:

> The waters leapt around her in a wild confusion
> Sent silver spraylets through thick black hair,
> Caught up her black breasts, and she with easy motion
> Kept up her babe and self with slightest fear.
> And now she sings above the river's song,

But this imaginative evocation of poise and involuntary transcendence suffers from a more pedestrian impulse to spell out a well-intentioned gloss:

---

[75] Kykoveral No. 22 Anthology of West Indian Poetry (1957) p.73. The lines are reprinted in An Anthology of West Indian Poetry, Caribbean Quarterly, April, 1958 - The Federation Commemoration Issue.

She sings triumphant and with notes held long
She sings of mighty rivers.
She sings of noble givers
And with accents strong
She sings of the African womb
Everlasting above the tomb
She sings of her island Jamaica
She sings of the glory of Africa.

The same tendency to tell us what it all means disturbs a good moment in The Last Negro where the apocalyptic vision of the opening lines is finally dispelled by the intrusion of the fourth and by the self-conscious philosophising of the last two lines:

The last Negro looks into the sun
Into the gold flames
Feeling the heat of stars
And close is God
In creation
In destruction.
For time is God is Man
And peace is chaos.

The change from Negritude to attitudes to Africa in a context of building the new West Indian nation is complete in Vera Bell's 'Ancestor on the Auction Block'.[76] The poem tells us of shame over the slave ancestors and sees this shame as another form of enslavement. But a "compelling" vision of the humiliated ancestor forces a confrontation which is liberating: "Humiliated/I cry to the eternal abyss/For understanding/Ancestor on the auction block/Across the years your eyes meet mine/ Electric/I am transformed/My freedom is within myself." The poem does not communicate any of the conflict it tells us about and the development is arbitrary. In the final stanza, the West Indian sees the place of the slave past in building the new West Indian nation: "I see you sweating, toiling suffering/Within your loins I see the seed/Of multitudes/From your labour/Grow roads, aqueducts, cultivation/A new country is born/Yours was the task to clear the ground/Mine be the task to build." The poem conveniently documents the passing from Negritude

---

[76] In An Anthology of West Indian Poetry, 'Caribbean Quarterly' (April 1958), pp. 126-127.

to West Indian nationalism. It is optimistic politics but hopeless poetry.

I have been arguing on the sociological level that African cultural survivals are hard to come by in the West Indies, and I have suggested that Negritude throughout the Caribbean was related to social and political movements of the time. If the former argument is valid, then Jahnheinz Jahn's theory of neo-African culture, in the West Indies at any rate, is disproved. His invoking of Negritude in support of this lame theory illustrates some of the dangers of using literature as primary sociological or cultural evidence. It also leads us to the point at which Cesaire and Leopold Senghor, the leading African exponent of Negritude make contact and the point at which the word "Negritude" falls into the hands of a-historical commentators. These developments did not have anything to do with West Indian writing in a direct way but I shall try to show how they nevertheless bear on the West Indies.

Negritude: Paris and After

Comparing Cesaire's poem with manifestations of Negritude in later works by West Indians, it becomes apparent that when we speak about Caribbean Negritude we are using a blanket term to describe not a literary movement but a number of spearate literary outbursts in different languages (French, English, Spanish, Dutch) and in different styles, the later manifestations of which might much more meaningfully be described as attitudes to Africa and to the colonial situation. Cesaire's poem, in fact, stands by itself, both as a work of art and as an act of self-discovery:

> Eia pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien inventé
> pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien exploré
> pour ceux qui n'ont jamais rien dompté
>
> mais ils s'abandonnent, saisis à l'essence de toute chose
> Ignorants des surfaces mais saisis par le mouvement de toute chose
> insoucieux de dompter, mais jouant le jeu du monde

The other French West Indian writers, according to Coulthard "have not gone beyond the vituperative stage and continue to flagellate white civilisation and throw themselves into an exaggerated primitiveness." Coulthard quotes the following lines from a poem by the Martiniquan Georges Desportes to illustrate the meeting of this primitivism with conventional European notions of savagery:

> We have stripped off our European clothes,
> Magnificent brutes and barbarians that we are,
> And we have danced naked around the high flames -
> .....
> Stark naked around the palm-trees, stark naked under the bamboos
> We shout under the sky of the Tropics,
> To the sound of powerful Caribbean jazz,
> Our pride in being Negroes,
> The glory of being black.[77]

The beginnings of an actual movement in the sense of a group sharing a programme of a sort and meeting to discuss mutual interests are to be found in Paris. Cesaire arrived there in 1931 three years after Senghor had arrived from Dakar. Also in Paris, was Leon Damas of French Guiana. Each of these men had experienced French colonialist policy, each was concerned with the place of the Negro in French civilisation and with the Negro's relation to Africa. Damas was the first to be published - in 1937[78] - but it was the relationship between Senghor and Cesaire that produced the most far-reaching results. It would be over-simple to suggest that Cesaire was Senghor's teacher, but Senghor's later tribute would seem to suggest that the younger man did in fact prove an invigorating influence. In any event, Cesaire's poem was first published in 1939: although it was largely unnoticed, Senghor could not possibly have failed to recognise affinities and see newly because of his friend's work.

When the Second World War broke out, Senghor went into the French army and Cesaire returned to Martinique. In an aggrieved tone, Jahnheinz Jahn relates how

---

77 'Auto da fe' in Poetes d' expression francaise (Paris, 1947), an anthology edited by Leon Damas. See Coulthard Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature, p.67.

78 Pigments (Paris, Gallimard 1937).

in 1941 "when Hitler's tanks overran France", Andre Breton, the arch-surrealist ran away from the Germans, followed "the path of Columbus" to the Antilles, thought he had discovered the Black poet "and began to beat the drum for him."[79] In 1947 the Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal[80] appeared again in France with an introduction by Breton. Breton's claim that Cesaire was a surrealist poet need not engage us here. The importance of his interest is that it drew the Cahier to the attention of post-war Paris intellectuals including Negroes and Africans.

For while the attempt was being made to divorce the Cahier's style from its content and social context and to place Cesaire in the French literary tradition, a much stronger movement in which Cesaire himself participated was endowing him with roots of a different kind. Senghor who had published Chants d'Ombre (1945)[81] and Cesaire whose Les Armes Miraculeuses[82] (1946) had also appeared, were at the centre of a colony of French Africans and French colonial Negroes in Paris. With the help of French intellectuals, notably Jean-Paul Sartre, they founded in 1947 the magazine Presence Africaine 'Cultural Journal of the Negro World'. In the following year Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malagache[83] appeared with an introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre. From this moment, the word 'Negritude' became a cult word for indicating "a certain quality common to the thoughts and to the behaviour of Negroes." It is worth pointing out that the people involved in these developments were French-speaking and that British Africans and West Indians were either sceptical of or ignorant about the developing fashions. But by 1953, Presence Africaine began publishing an English edition, and in 1956 they organised in Paris the first International Congress of Negro writers and

---

[79] O Muntu p.140-1.

[80] Paris: Bordas

[81] Leopold Sedar Senghor Chants d'Ombre (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1945).

[82] Paris: Gallimard

[83] Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948.

artists. The assumption connecting the 'Cultural Journal of the Negro World' and Senghor's wide-ranging anthology was that there is a Negro culture to which all Negroes belonged, and of which literary Negritude is an expression.

At first sight this position does not seem to differ very much from that of Jahnheinz Jahn

> ... Negritude was avowal: avowal of Africa. It became possible to think and write in the African way; Africa was rediscovered, re-awakened; from now on African culture was to, and did furnish the standards ... Negritude is nothing more nor less than the conscious beginning of neo-African literature.[84]

What Senghor calls 'Negro literature', Jahn calls 'neo-African'. And Jahn's 'Neo-African culture' is to be found in the same areas as Senghor's 'Negro culture'. When we look too at the stylistic qualities that each of these theorists associates with writing by the descendants of Africans there is a mutual emphasis on rhythm and image as defining characteristics.

It is interesting to find therefore that in Muntu, Jahn places the American Negro Richard Wright "in the first rank of North American narrative writers":

> Each of his books does indeed set an example, yet neither his style nor his thought is African. Western literature possesses in him a great writer, but to African literature he does not belong.

Dealing with the same writer, Senghor, however, declares:

> I remember that when we discovered Wright we were struck by his poems; 'I am black and I have seen ...' This poem upon analysis, was a 'committed' poem, a poem of image, a poem of rhythm. Wright, without realising it, was in the African Negro line! ... If one reads Black Boy or other works [by American Negroes] one can draw comparisons between them and an African Negro recital.[85]

It is very strange indeed that two theorists claiming objectivity by means of the same stylistic criteria should differ so radically in assessing the same material. The phenomenon suggests that the source of the disagreement lies in a difference

---

[84] Muntu p. 206 and p.207

[85] The 1st International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists (Paris: Presence Africaine June-November 1956) p.73 and p.74.

in the theories each man supports. For while Jahn's neo-African culture derives from a theory of actual cultural survivals, Senghor invests in the survival of the descendants of Africans themselves. Senghor's Negro culture depends upon a theory of the African personality. The theory was expounded at the first International conference of Negro writers and artists, and was later reprinted as 'The spirit of civilisation, or the laws of African negro culture.'[86]

Physio-psychology and Culture

Senghor's physio-psychology of the Negro is a hopeless confusion of European romanticism and a parody of Cesaire's dramatic discovery in the Cahier. Whereas Cesaire moves from this point to a universal vision, Senghor concocts an exclusive theory of the Negro personality. Instead of trying to argue against this theory, I shall simply quote its three main points.

Senghor begins with the notion that the Negro is the man of Nature: "By tradition he lives of the soil and with the soil, in and by the Cosmos. He is sensual, a being with open senses, with no intermediary between subject and object. He is, first of all, sounds, scents, rhythms, forms and colours; I would say that he is touch before being eye like the white European" (p.52).

The next paragraph makes a distinction between Negro reason and White reason: "The Negro reason does not impoverish things, it does not mould them into rigid patterns by eliminating the roots and the sap: it flows in the arteries of things, it weds all their contours to dwell at the living heart of the real. White reason is analytic through utilisation: Negro reason is intuitive through participation" (p.52).

Finally, Senghor announces, one must take note of "the sensitiveness of the coloured man, his emotional power ... Water moves him because it flows, fluid

---

[86] In The 1st International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists, (Paris, June-November 1956) pp. 51-64. Quotations are followed by page references to this publication.

and blue, above all because it cleanses, still more because it purifies" (p.52).

Almost two hundred years after Long's pseudo-scientific denigration, a Negro writer answers in pseudo-poetic prose. Having thus outlined his "physio-psychology" of the Negro, Senghor describes African Negro social life and the place of Literature and art as communal activities: They exist for all, they are committed, and they are functionally beautiful. At this point he turns to describe image and rhythm "the two fundamental features of African Negro style." Since these are entirely bound up with the physio-psychology of the Negro, and represent the essence of Negro civilisation, it follows for Senghor, that the survival of the descendants of Africans is the same as the survival of Negro civilisation: The conclusion, granted these subjective premises, is inevitable:

> The Spirit of African Negro civilisation consciously or not, animates the best Negro artists and writers of today, whether they come from Africa or America. So far as they are conscious of African Negro culture and are inspired by it they are elevated in the international scale; so far as they turn their backs on Africa the mother they degenerate and become feeble. (p.64)

It is a long way indeed from the Pan-Negro and Pan-African movements originating in the Caribbean and North America to the theory of the culture-bearing person outlined by Senghor. By tracing broadly the processes of acculturation and devaluation which took place in the West Indies, however, I have tried to show that when the reaction came the terms could only be Africa, the African past and various forms of race theories based upon the physical survival of the Negro. The dialetic necessitated by the long history of colonialism is summarised by Frantz Fanon who was not unaware of some of the inherent dangers:

> ... The unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture. On the whole, the poets of Negro-ism oppose the idea of an old Europe to a young Africa, tiresome reasoning to lyricism, oppressive logic to high-stepping nature, and on one side stiffness, ceremony, etiquette, and scepticism while on the other, frankness, liveliness, liberty and - why not? - luxuriance: but also irresponsibility.
>
> The poets of Negro-ism will not stop at the limits of the continent. From America, black voices will take up the hymn with fuller unison ....

> The historical necessity in which the men of African culture find themselves to racialise their claims and to speak more of African culture than of national culture will tend to lead them up a blind alley.[87]

As far as the West Indies is concerned, the pan-Negro and pan-African movements of the twentieth century have tended to overemphasise the presence of African cultural survivals. With the increased currency of Cesaire's poem another wrong impression has been given. The Caribbean as a single unit is probably a good political ambition but it is necessary to insist that marked dissimilarities in post-Emancipation history and peculiarities arising from differences in European orientations have kept the former Imperial territories separate. The slave past and the majority presence of the Negro are not enough or have not been sufficiently exploited to create either a Caribbean culture or a Caribbean nation.

In the final section of this chapter therefore I want to restrict myself to the West Indies and look at some novels in which Africa and Africans or attitudes to these appear.

Of the novels selected, two may be described as historical. They are H. G. de Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall (1929), set in the Jamaica of the 1830's and Namba Roy's Black Albino (1961) set in a Maroon (run-away slave) community in an even earlier period. In a different spirit altogether is V. S. Reid's The Leopard (1958) which takes its stimulus from Kenya at the time of the Mau-Mau rebellion. The central character is Nebu a young warrior, half-Masai and half-Kikuyu. Reid may have taken one or two details from Joma Kenyatta's anthropological Facing Mount Kenya (1938) but his Kenya is a totally imaginary one. This is not the case with Denis Williams' Other Leopards (1963) and O. R. Dathorne's The Scholar Man (1964). Both Williams and Dathorne have lived and worked in Africa. Dathorne was a University lecturer in English at Ibadan, and Williams lectured in Fine Art at Khartoum Technical Institute. Both writers set their

---

87 'On National Culture' in The Wretched of the Earth pp. 172 and 173.

novels in Africa and each takes as a central character a West Indian Negro concerned with the question of his personal identity. Another novel I wish to consider here is not an obvious choice. George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960) is set on the fictional island of San Cristobal, newly-independent and lacking orientation. The most interesting character is the girl Fola, a member of the light-skinned middle-class. Lamming's use of a religious ceremony in this novel, however, offers an interesting comparison with the way in which de Lisser presents a ceremony in The White Witch of Rosehall. It is convenient to begin with The White Witch of Rosehall, and then Season of Adventure.

The White Witch of Rosehall

The story of Annie Palmer's loves and sensational actions, a tale of witchcraft, rum and murder in the tropics is told against a systematic exposition of the general features of life on a slave plantation. First published in 1929, it has been re-printed at least ten times up to 1960. In 1964 it sold 7,500 copies, and in 1965, the sales increased to 9,000. Ninety per cent. of the sales are to the West Indies, mainly Jamaica. The work has little literary merit.

The technique is simple. By using a newly-arrived Englishman Robert Rutherford as a centre of consciousness in the novel, de Lisser is able to feed the reader with information that cannot be conveyed satisfactorily in authorial commentary or in action. As a new-comer to the tropics, Rutherford is eminently shockable. The scene in which Millie the free mulatto girl speaks of her grandfather's wealth and power, and of her own education offers a good example of de Lisser's technique for conveying information. Incidentally, it also illustrates the author's recurrent sense of social distinctions and his eye for pretension.

'Is your grandfather a white man, Millie?' he asked.

'One of them was; but he's dead; he was me father's father.'

'Then this other grandfather of yours whom you invoke with such reverence and awe?'

She looked puzzled.

'My language' he smiled, 'is perhaps not sufficiently "educated". I mean who and of what colour is this other grandfather of yours'

'He is black, coal black, and he tall and old, very old: he is a Guinea man and wise! He can talk to spirits, like the old witch in de Bible, who call up Samuel. Me gran' father is very great; everybody here 'fraid for him - even Mrs. Palmer.

'I see! An African and what you call out here an obeahman. Is that it?'

'Y-e-ee-s; but he's more than a obeah man. More powerful.'

'Originally an African witch-doctor I suppose and a hoary old scoundrel. Let him take care he doesn't get into trouble, Millie.'

'They can't do him anything; him is too strong. He protect me, an' he can protect you too, if you want ...' (The White Witch of Rosehall, pp. 74-75)

Thus we find out about Takoo, the obeah man, an African feared by the rest of the slaves including the Creoles.

When Millie becomes Annie Palmer's rival for the privilege of sleeping with Rutherford, Annie, the white witch, casts a spell on the brown girl. Love rivalry slides into a battle between Mrs. Palmer's magic and that of Takoo, the African obeah man. In this context the ceremony of exorcism carried out by Takoo is the occasion of a sensational tour de force. Authorial commentary and the responses of two observing characters are used both to increase the sense of the exotic and to impose a "dark continent" view on the material. In the following quotations from the novel I want to illustrate both the sensationalism and the denigrating tactics; at the same time I would like to isolate elements in the ceremony which suggest something more meaningful than de Lisser's attitude allows him to imagine:

From their point of vantage, Rutherford and his friend, Rider identify for us the use of drums, chanting and the swaying of bodies, the heavy emphasis on rhythm in African religious practice:

About twenty yards away a concourse of people crouched upon the ground forming a rude circle and within this circle blazed a great fire which hissed and crackled and threw fierce sparks upwards and brought into fiery relief the strained, staring faces of the men and women from whose lips streamed forth an eerie, curious sound. Bodies swayed to right and left in unison with the rhythm of the chant, and the drum-throbs marked the cadences of the hymn of exorcism. It was nothing that even Rider had ever heard before, no Christian words or air; it was something that had come out of Africa and was remembered still. There were people in the swaying crowd who had been born in Africa, and in their minds and emotions they had travelled back to that dark continent tonight and were worshipping again some sinister deity with power and will to harm. One to be propitiated with sacrifice and who would not be turned aside from his designs by mere appeals and prayers for mercy. (The White Witch of Rosehall p.201)

The passage breaks into two parts. In the second (which I have italicised) the omniscient author takes us away from the action to introduce an unsympathetic gloss. In the first part, an awkwardly constructed opening sentence describes the stock scene of savages round the fire. The second sentence begins with concrete detail but ends with an assertion which resists any kind of imagined response. If we read carelessly, however, there is a sensational effect.

In the next quotation, de Lisser uses repetition (syntactic and lexical) to express the rhythmic monotonous period of waiting which in cult practice is the waiting for the arrival of the gods. "For over an hour must this chant have continued; for over an hour must these people have squatted there on the bare damp earth, watching the roaring flames, singing, singing, in that low monotonous voice and waiting for what was to happen" (p.202). In de Lisser's design, "what was to happen" is the managed entry of the high priest and the girl at midnight. The description of possession by the gods becomes, in this account, just a sensational crumb before the big moment; "The roll and throb of the drums went on. Suddenly a wild burst of laughter rent the air and a young woman in the first row of the crowd pitched forward on her face, crying and laughing convulsively, twitching her limbs as in a fit" (p.202). In the authorial gloss which follows, de Lisser offers an interpretation of this phenomenon the purpose of which is to increase our

sense of the savagery of the worshippers: "Hysterics had seized her, her nerves had given way; probably this was the first time she had participated in such an orgy, probably she knew Millicent and was filled with fears for herself, for who could be free from danger? But no one took any notice of her; only the tempo of the chant quickened, there was a note of exultation in it now. There were to be wonderful manifestations tonight, and the spirits of the older hierophants rejoiced and revelled in the anticipation of what was to come. Not often did they dare to practise thus the ritual of an obscene faith, the music of Old Africa" (p.202).

It is the conventional witching time ("No stroke of bell announced the hour") when de Lisser introduced Takoo extravegantly dressed in flaming red, followed by Millicent, naked at the top, but wrapped from the waist down "in a robe of purest white". Behind them comes a boy carrying "a snow-white kid" for the sacrifice. Predictably, silence falls. Just as predictably, the chanting recommences "louder, quicker, frenzied". The worshippers become "wildly agitated fanatics, sweat pouring from their bodies, foam flecking the lips of not a few." Takoo is the focus of all their possessed attention.

> But the gaze of Robert and Rider was fixed on the unhappy girl who sat staring into the fire, hardly conscious of what was proceeding around her, pale in that leaping light, with lines of fatigue and terror stamped upon her face. She looked as though she it was who would be the sacrifice to be offered up that night.
>
> Robert turned sick, clutched Rider's arm. He whispered: 'This is awful, Rider, it should be stopped. That girl will die of exposure if of nothing else; and it is all to vilely heathenish. I cannot look on any more'
>
> (The White Witch of Rosehall, p.204)

By switching so abruptly from omniscient narration to the shocked disapproving response of the characters, de Lisser undermines an already unconvincing description. Not only is the response of the characters totally inappropriate; the author's design to make us disapproving spectators as well is too blatent.

There is only one African in The White Witch of Rosehall. But in looking at the novel we have seen the author artlessly imposing an inherited attitude to Africa and African religion on his material. Implicit in de Lisser's account is the notion that rhythm is an African property. Rhythm indeed has become almost a convention in West Indian writing for invoking Africa.

One straightforward use occurs in an authorial description given in Geoffrey Drayton's novel of childhood in the West Indies, Christopher (1959):

> On moonlight nights the labourers in the plantation villages collected to sing hymns. Their humns were Christian, but the rhythms to which they sang them were African, simple and repetitive, gaining speed and volume as they gained in length. In the churches the negroes had built for themselves, where untrained negro priests presided, the congregations beat time with tambourines. At nights in the open air, drums syncopated.
> (Christopher, 1959, p.24)

Less specific is an instance in O. R. Dathorne's The Scholar Man (1959) when we are told of the hero, who is about to leave England for Africa, that his "Feet worried the pavements, pounding drum-beats into it to tantalise civilised day."

Season of Adventure

How rhythm occurs in another West Indian novel may best be approached through an observation by V. S. Naipaul on his terrified visit to Trinidad in 1960:
... "The city throbbed with steel bands. A good opening line for a novelist or a travel writer, but the steel band used to be regarded as a high manifestation of West Indian culture, and it was a sound I detested." (The Middle Passage 1962). George Lamming's nationalistic novel Season of Adventure (1960) begins: "Beyond the horizons of the trees, it was too black to see the sky. But the music was there, loud as a gospel to a believer's ears. It was the music of Stell Drums, hard strident and clear ..." In a sense, Season of Adventure is a celebration (the first literary one) of the steel band. Not only does the sound of the steel drums hang in the air throughout the novel: at the climax it is a glorious parade

of all the bands marching on to Freedom Square which prepares the way for a new government:

> Gort led in solo with the calypsoes and digging songs that had first christened his master's name: Never Never me again; Glory, Glory, King Coca-Cola; Doctor Say you Pay to Earn But Lantern say you Pay to Learn; The Queen's Canary Fly Away; River Ben Come Down; Goin' to see Aunt Jane; and not the native folk-songs alone. The paradox of their double culture was no less honoured with rhythm. For they changed as the mood assailed them; and a mood had soon taken them back to childhood and the hymns of their chapel days: Hold the Fort For I am Coming, I Got a Sword in My Hand, Help me to Use it Lord; and back again the music would swing as though their moods were magnet which the rhythms had waited for. Noe it was a noise of: Never, Never Me Again, and Daylight Come and I Wanna Go Home. And each time the change came, the boss drums would wait to hear from Gort who led in solo and on no other than his dead master's drum. (Season of Adventure, p.358)

But Lamming's nationalism is not the fashionable slogan-bearing Naipaul goes out of his way to snipe at. And the use of rhythm, while suggesting Africa, is more complex than that of Drayton or Dathorne.

Throughout Season of Adventure, the outcast Drum Boys' instinctive and immediate possession of the language of the drums is contrasted with the vacuous materialistic strivings of a ruling middle-class, irritably denying all intimations of kinship with the deprived citizens of San Cristobal. For the Drum Boys, "It seemed this music had always been there, immortal as the origin of water swinging new soundings up from the sea's dark tomb of noise." In this sense, their lack of education into the new ways of life is an advantage. For "education wipe out everythin' San Cristobal got except the ceremony an' the bands. To teacher an' all who well-to-do it happen. Everythin' wipe out, leavin' only what they learn." If a man "must got somethin' that he can't let go", then only the Drum Boys of San Cristobal are in possession of a rooted legacy. After the triumph of the drums and the establishment of the Second Republic, the new president Dr. Kofi James-Williams Baako outlines the nation's problems in a radio speech. Part of the authorial reportage runs: "It was language which

caused the First Republic to fall. And the Second would suffer the same fate; the Second and the Third unless they tried to find a language which was no less immediate than the language of the drums." The Second Republic, and The West Indian nation, Lamming is urging, must not only take a backward glance at its origins, it must use the personal relation of the Drum Boys to their drums as a model for the meaningful and relevant appropriation of their double cultural heritage. The rhythms in the novel suggest an African heritage but they belong to the West Indian steel bands.

The non-denigrating and increasingly free artistic approach to Africa by West Indian writers is the result of movements I have already described. About twenty-seven years after the first publication of The White Witch of Rosehall (1929) George Lamming visited Haiti (in de Lisser's view "the very stronghold of devil-craft in this part of the world"). Between the two events the "dark continent" view of Africa and the Black Republic had been more or less corrected. Lamming was able to write:[88]

> In the republic of Haiti - one corner of the Caribbean cradle - a native religion sometimes forces the official Law to negotiate with peasants who have retained a racial and historic desire to worship their original gods. We do not have to share their faith in order to see the universal significance of certain themes implicit in the particular ceremony of the Souls I witnessed four years ago in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince.

It is useful to look at the way in which Lamming describes this ceremony in The Pleasures of Exile:

> This ceremony of the Souls is regarded by the Haitian peasant as a solemn communion; for he hears, at first hand, the secrets of the Dead. The celebrants are mainly relatives of the deceased who, ever since their death, have been locked in Water. It is the duty of the Dead to return and offer on this momentous night, a full and honest report on their past relations with the living ... It is the duty of the Dead to speak, since their release from that purgatory of Water cannot be realised until they have fulfilled the contract which this ceremony symbolises. The Dead need to speak if they are going to enter that eternity which will be their last and permanent Future. The living demand to hear whether there is any need for forgiveness, for redemption ... Different as they may be in their present state of existence, those alive and those now Dead - their ambitions point to a similar end. They are interested in their Future. (pp. 9-10)

---

[88] George Lamming The Pleasures of Exile (1960) p.9.

The ceremony thus interpreted in Lamming's collection of essays seems to be the same as a religious ceremony for the resurrection of the dead in his novel Season of Adventure. In the fiction Lamming describes a coherent practice in which rhythmic drums, chanting and dance, spirit possession, a dominating high priest and a sacrifice of two white cockerels are important elements. To put it this way is to suggest some sort of similarity with de Lisser's extravaganza in The White Witch of Rosehall, and indeed both the historical reconstruction and Lamming's interpretative recreation point past more immediate sources to the West African serpent cult that first reached the islands in the sixteenth century.

In each of the novels, however, the ceremony is witnessed by a central[89] character and it is this aspect of the similarity between them that I would like to begin with. The discussion of Lamming's use of the ceremony offers an opportunity to illustrate the wide difference in "real life" attitude to their raw material between Lamming and de Lisser. At the same time it throws light on some of their differences as practitioners of the art of fiction. In these two respects de Lisser and Lamming stand at opposite ends of the spectrum in West Indian writing.

The context in which Lamming's ceremony appears is relevant. Season of Adventure impresses one as a striking work by an outstanding novelist. It is a difficult novel to assess because, in theory at any rate, it runs a number of risks: it seems to contain too many urgent themes jostling for the author's interest and the reader's attention; the plot demands to be taken literally and symbolically at the same time, and with equal intensity; it is as much about a set of very special historical or social circumstances as about every man's personal dilemma. Some of these difficulties must have told on a reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement (1960). After an inept recounting of the story the review

---

[89] In Chapter Twelve of Jan Carew's Wild Coast (1958), the young mulatto hero undergoes a similar experience. But Carew neither prepares for it nor follows it up. The interest is largely sensational.

concludes: "An alert and hardworking reader may not only be able to follow the sequence of events and elucidate the symbolism but discern Mr. Lamming's intelligence and ability behind the stylistic tricks." It is possible that a West Indian reader would find it easier to follow the novel or may consider it more worthwhile to pursue its meanings seriously, but any complex novel which is also a fictional creation, calls for, and yields to any hard-working reader. To say that such and such a novel is difficult is less a critical opinion on the work than an expression of indifference to it or of unwillingness at a given time to make the effort of understanding.

The reviewer quoted above did in fact respond to the novel's most accessible interest in feeling that the central character was Fola "an educated, middle-class, West Indian whom a visit to a voodoo ceremony sets off on a troubled search into her origins (both racial and personal - her legal father is not her true one)." Lamming realises Fola's problem in several sets of relationships in the novel: with her mother Agnes who is uncertain whether Fola's father is European or Negro; with her sterile step-father Piggott and the privileged families in the newly independent republic; with the peasant world of the deprived masses in the Forest Reserve - in particular, with Chiki the suffering artist, and the political fanatic Powell; and with Charlot the European who teaches her history at school, who has patronisingly brought her to witness the voodoo ceremony. This means that Fola is solidly realised as a character involved in human relationships in a social context in the novel. Whatever symbolic meanings there may be are built upon these solid foundations. But while Fola dominates the novel, it is worth noting that each of the characters, whether Belinda the prostitute or Piggott the detestable power in the land, becomes a centre of interest in turn. The author's compassion for his characters in the toils of a pressing set of social and political circumstances never allows the reader to rest on a selective principle

in the way it is possible to rest with one character in A House for Mr. Biswas. This kind of compassion is impressively witnessed at the end of chapter XIV where an Author's Note on the character Powell breaks the fictional illusion. The last two paragraphs run:

> I believe deep in my bones that the mad impulse which drove Powell to his criminal defeat was largely my doing. I will not have this explained away by talk about environment; nor can I allow my own moral infirmity to be transferred to a foreign conscience, labelled imperialist. I shall go beyond my grave in the knowledge that I am responsible for what happened to my brother.
>
> Powell still resides somewhere in my heart, with a dubious love, some strange, nameless shadow of regret; and yet with the deepest, deepest nostalgia. For I have never felt myself to be an honest part of anything since the world of his childhood deserted me. (Season of Adventure, p.332)

What I am suggesting in all this is that it is within an ambitious design that Fola's process takes place and that Season of Adventure raises problems which a mechanical art of the novel criticism would find difficult to cope with. In discussing the way in which Lamming uses the voodoo ceremony in Fola's process it will not be possible to avoid suggesting the large dimensions of the novel.

Fola is the novel's prime example of the character who makes "every man's backward glance." Her upbringing has alienated her from the people of the Forest Reserve. The social cleavage from which Lamming develops Fola's personal problem is best expressed in the conversation between Crim and Powell two Drum Boys who notice her in the crowd at the tonelle or meeting place where the religious ceremony is taking place. Fola has been brought to this place by her history teacher Charlot:

> 'Is what my eyes seein'?' Powell said. 'Over there, first row.'
>
> They both looked at the girl whose elegance was no less conspicuous than the solitary white face beside her.
>
> 'Is the stranger man who bring her,' Crim said, 'or else she won't be here.'
>
> 'Look at her good,' said Powell, 'education an' class just twist that girl mouth right out o' shape. Like all the rest she learn fast how to talk two ways.'
>
> Crim couldn't resist admiring the novelty which her presence had created in the tonelle.

'Is great she look,' he said 'almost as great as Gort.'
'She got open-air talk an' inside talk,' said Powell. 'Like tonight she go talk great with the stranger man. Grammar an' clause, where do turn into doos, plural and singular in correct formation, an' all that. But inside, like between you an' me, she tongue make the same rat-trap noise. Then she talk real, an' sentences come tumblin' down like one-foot man. Is how them all is.' (Season of Adventure, p.21)

But Fola's alienation from the Reserve has a broader parallel. The tonelle where the West African serpent cult has persisted, though undergoing change over three hundred years, is a stark reminder of Africa and the slave migrations. In the novel Lamming visualises social cleavage and alienation from the ancestral past in terms of its effects upon human personality. Fola is "a stranger within her own forgotten gates." Her denial of the Reserve is seen as denial of part of herself. Shame and fear have led her to accept an uneasy social identity among the privileged and aloof familiers of the newly independent republic. The tortuous season of adventure comes when Fola is released from misconception to see herself as 'Fola and other than'. The distance she is to travel and the uncertainty of her quest are conveniently indicated in her meeting with Veronica, daughter of the Republic's Vice-President. Fola in rebellion, has arranged the meeting for the Moon Glow brothel and bar, and enters armed with cigarettes to tell a fantastic tale of her abduction, sexual terror and delight at the hands of one of the Reserve Boys. The tale is totally invented. Veronica reacts as the old Fola might have:

'But suppose, Fola, suppose,' Veronica cried looking round for the first assurance of their privacy, 'suppose it put you in the family way.'

Fola maintains an almost satisfied silence:

The trees threw down a cry of leaves outside as Fola thought: 'First things first and first is the worst: my old image makes her ask: not who he is, but suppose it happens.' But this was not Fola whom Veronica new saw, and the didn't know there was another Fola; Fola and other than. This Fola had started on a history of needs whose details she alone would be able to distinguish: a season of adventure which no man in the republic could predict. (Season of Adventure, pp. 184-185)

In exploring Fola's attitude to the tonelle, Lamming is also writing about the West Indian Negro's attitude to Africa. This becomes obvious in the novel when Fola, after her "awakening" experience at the ceremony suddenly realises why her visit to the tonelle is more problematic than the visit of American tourists to European monuments:

> It was because, for Liza and herself it was because their relation to the tonelle was far more personal than any monument could ever be to an American in his mad pursuit of origins. Personal and near..... Her relation to the tonelle was near and more personal since the conditions of her life today, the conditions of Liza's life in this very moment, could recall a departure that was near and tangible: the departure of those slaves who had started the serpent cult which the drums in their dumb eloquence had sought to resurrect ...
>
> Part-product of that world, living still under the shadow of its past disfigurement, all her emotions had sprung from a nervous caution to accept it as her root, her natural gift of legacies. Fear was the honest and ignorant instinct she had felt in the tonelle. Her shame, like that of all San Cristobal was unavoidable. (Season of Adventure, pp. 93-94)

The differences between the two kinds of discourse have to be taken into account but pages 93-94 of Season of Adventure run close to pages 160-161 of The Pleasures of Exile. In the latter work, a paragraph on Americans in Europe is followed by Lamming's view of the West Indian Negro's attitude to Africa:

> The West Indian Negro who gets out on a similar journey to Africa is less secure. His relation to that continent is more personal and more problematic. It is more personal because the conditions of his life today, his status as a man, are a clear indication of the reasons which led to the departure of his ancestors from that continent. ... His relation to Africa is more problematic because he has not ... been introduced to it through history. He knows it through rumour and myth which is made sinister by a foreign tutelage, and he becomes, through the gradual conditioning of his education, identified with fear: fear of that continent as a world beyond human intervention. Part product of that world, and living still under the shadow of its past disfigurement, he appears reluctant to acknowledge his share of the legacy which is part of his heritage.
>
> (The Pleasures of Exile, p.160 and p.161)

Lamming projects the ceremony for the resurrection of the dead as a symbolic occasion for Fola and as an actual experience setting upon her journey towards self-discovery. Lamming insinuates the idea of Fola's "hidden parallel of feeling" with the "course exuberant faces" at the tonelle through the European,

Charlot. Charlot discerns that Fola responds to rhythm like the worshippers:

> 'You want to suggest that I believe in all "that"' she said. Her voice was low, distant closing on a note of quiet disdain.
> 'But I've seen you dance, Fola.'
> 'What's that got to do ...'
> 'It's the same rhythm,' he said. 'And the music of the Steel Drums. You yourself have said no music makes you feel the same way.'
> 'But what's that got to do with holding ceremonies?' she challenged, 'and talking to the dead?'
> 'There couldn't be any music without the ceremonies' said Charlot. 'You couldn't do your dancing without those women. It's from being so near to them that you have learnt how to move your body.
> Fola felt a sudden resentment towards him. Her triumph would have to be as large as the families whom she was about to defend; for the civilised honour of the whole republic was now in danger.
> 'Near?' she said subtly.
> 'In feeling you are' said Charlot, 'you can deny them anything except the way you feel when the same rhythm holds you.'
>
> (Season of Adventure, pp. 27-28)

This comes close indeed to saying all your let have rhythm. But Lamming makes brilliant use of the European cliche. The novelist's problem at this point is to create in the reader an expectation that something is about to happen to Fola, and that the something has to do with a special relationship that exists between Fola and the cultists but not between the cultists and Charlot. At the same time, the specialness of Fola's relationship with the cultists must not preclude the possibility of a more remote but equally valid kinship between the human cultists and Charlot. Charlot's insistence and Fola's defensiveness come into conflict in such a way as to make Fola's denial highly significant, leaving Charlot's sense of his total disconnection, which we suspect to be mistaken, as an issue to be developed later. More practically, Lamming replaces African drums with the familiar and in fact pervasive West Indian steel band to give the initial observation by Charlot an air of truth.

Lamming builds upon this rhetorical play by filtering realistic descriptions of feverish dance, monotonous chanting and spirit possession through Fola's disturbed consciousness so that we are left to feel that a combination of Charlot's

superior nagging and the mass-belief of the devotees have made her vulnerable:

> The voices were all raised in prayer, answering to the grave supplications of the priest. Fola looked to see if there was movement in the tent; but her glance was intercepted by an old woman who still watched her. Was the old woman's glance an accident? The voices had wrought a gradual contamination of Fola's senses. Was she becoming a part of their belief? Would they really hear the sound of dead voices in the tent? Her questions were other than an interest to examine. She became aware of their contagion in her mind. The prayers were a conspiracy against her doubt. The voices grew loud and louder in their prayers, each prayer like a furious bargain for her faith. (Season of Adventure, pp. 33-34)

Of course, Fola does not leap in for a howl and a dance - she is too busy wondering whether her senses are deceiving her.

At this point it is possible to locate some major differences in intention and tactics between de Lisser and Lamming for in The White Witch of Rosehall, too, a central character Robert Rutherford witnesses the ceremony of exorcism in the company of a friend, Rider. The first thing to notice is that Rutherford is at a distance, not in the crowd. Nevertheless he had the beginnings of an experience:

> A shudder passed through Robert; to his surprise he found that he too was slightly moving his body to the rhythm of the sound. Rider had himself better in hand, but the hypnotic influence of the scene did not leave him entirely unaffected. It had an appeal to the more primitive emotions. It stirred up something in the depths of one's being. He could understand how devotees in pagan lands were moved at times almost to madness by the call and compulsion of their strange and horrible religions.
> (The White Witch of Rosehall, p.202)

Although de Lisser allows Rutherford to feel the "fascination of the abomination" this does not become an experience for the character. After the appearance of Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902) episodes dealing with the European character affected by the primitive become a must in the second-rate literature of tropica. Once de Lisser makes the gesture at this convention, a gap rapidly opens up again between the civilised Englishmand and the pagan cultists. Rutherford resumes a function as the enlarging eye upon an exotic rite which it is de Lisser's object to "write-up".

The detailed and spectacular ceremony described in Season of Adventure on the other hand is subservient to a process of dissolution in the observing character. The episode is divided into omniscient authorial description of the ceremony, subjective impressions from Charlot and Fola, snatches of conversation between Crim and Powell and a continuing argument between Fola and Charlot. Expectations are early set up with regard to Fola, and because each return to her consciousness finds her further on towards a crisis of "conversion", each retreat to another mode of presentation becomes charged either with suspense or with a curious relevance for our interest in the girl's subjective state.

The details of the ceremony are every bit as exotic as those in de Lisser's novel but by making Fola such an intense focus of interest in a psychological sense, Lamming forces the exciting events into a corrosive background. We become aware of the feverishness of the dance as an aspect of Fola's growing awareness:

> ... The atmosphere of the tonelle had increased in its effect upon her. There was something intimidating about the women. The dance had become more feverish. Fola recognised what they were doing, but there was too much tension in their bodies. She expected something to collapse inside them. Fola had lived in the shadow of two terrors: hypnosis and the sight of rats. She thought of both and the dancing made her shudder. (Season of Adventure, p.25)

In a similar fashion, the case of spirit possession is not used as a spectacle in itself. Indeed, Lamming seems to throw away spectacular possibilities by allowing the possessed woman to go into her swoon behind Fola's back while Fola's eyes are fixed upon the approaching procession led by the high priest or Houngan:

> It seemed there was no order to his giving. Fola could feel the pimples swelling over her arms. She studied the faces of those who had drunk from the bottle of gin so that she might detect some order in the Houngan's benediction. But a sweat broke under her eyes as she heard the swoon of a woman's voice behind her. She wanted to ask Charlot what he would do if the Houngan ordered them to drink. But the woman's voice was reaching cold and sticky as a hand into her skull. Her breath blew a staleness of gin odour round Fola's ears. Fola's attention was divided between the crippled swoon of the woman's voice and the progress which the procession was making towards the bamboo pole.

> Would Charlot drink of the gin? And what would happen if she refused? Was the woman behind her going to be sick? It was the sound of a voice in some near stage of asphyxia, crying: 'Spirit, ride! Spirit! ride! ride! An' come, come, come sister, come, hold sister, hold and let it come, inside O! Spirit, let it, inside O spirit come! An' kind let it O O O come, come.' (Season of Adventure, p.31)

Paradoxically, Lamming's controlling purpose frees him to write in a manner that could be described as sensational if seen out of context. The description of the Houngan is a good example especially when compared with this description of Takoo at the climax of de Lisser's attempted spectacular:

> Takoo was clothed from head to foot in flaming red, robed as a high priest of Sassabonsum or some other potent God of the African forests. In this robe of office he loomed taller than Robert or Rider had ever seen him before, and there was dignity in his gait and a gloomy earnestness in his gaze that seemed to inspire that crouching silent audience with awe. (The White Witch of Rosehall, p.203)

Lamming's high priest would show up Takoo as a sheep in wolf's clothing:

> He was a short, black man, narrow around the waist, almost fragile in the spareness of his arms. He wore a pair of snake-skin sandals. The straps parted and crawled in a bright black radiance lapping round his toes. The smell of cemeteries rotted his hands. His eyes were the colour of burnt hay. Delirious in their gaze, they sparkled and cracked into splinters of light like glass. He carried an axe in his right hand, a bracelet of black bones was swinging freely round his wrist when he waved the axe in worship above his head. The gods resided in every tooth of point and blade. (Season of Adventure, pp. 31-32)

This is not a piece of lurid writing, however, because we are seeing from Fola's point of view and the Houngan is actually confronting her. At this stage her senses have almost been overwhelmed by the strange sights and sounds and the mass hysteria around her. The compelling presence of the Houngan completes the utter though temporary confusion of Fola's senses.

The sensational use of an African ceremony in The White Witch of Rosehall is accompanied by a revulsion against what is presented as African paganism. The fictional character's revulsion is shared by the author. In Season of Adventure the "dark continent" view is located in a character who is to be disburdened; the sensational aspects of the cult practice are used as a corrosive force freeing

Fola from shame and making for a new awareness of self. If Lamming does not denigrate his cultists, he also, crucially, avoids sentimentalising them. At the end of the novel, indeed, the tonelle is destroyed by fire and the Houngan has lost command and self-command. The politician Baako, in looking forward expresses a proper sociological view:

> He said he would ask the citizens of the Reserve and all like them to think again about their relation to the tonelle. He would not order them to change, but he would try to find a language which might explain that the magic of medical science was no less real than the previous magic of prayer. The difference was one of speed. Injections worked faster than a bribe for knowledge they could not guarantee.
> (Season of Adventure, p.365)

The "no less real than" hardly conceals a recognition by this authorially approved character that the practice of the cultists can also be seen as a symptom of social and economic frustration.

Lamming the novelist does not allow this sociological truth to prevent the cultists from imaging meanings in an involuntary way. With her new awareness Fola comes to see the privileged families in the republic as "decrepit skeletons near Federal Drive polluting the live air with wave upon wave of their corpse breathing." When she hesitates between the social safety of concealment and the shame of acknowledging her friends at the Reserve, Fola guiltily accuses herself of being a corpse: "Like the dead souls that could not trespass beyond their recorded lives, she had cut herself off from her own future." And when she intervenes to save Chiki from being arrested for the murder of Vice-President Raymond, Fola is seen as a dead coming to bear witness as well as like a believer possessed by the gods:

> The women watched Fola as though they had seen Guru's soul recover in flesh and stand in the tonelle, shouting what he knew about the diamonds which had disappeared again. Fola stood there, her eyes now closed, fist knotted like Aunt Jane's in her possession. They thought the girl was a corpse until the corporal disturbed her sleep.
> (Season of Adventure, p.274)

West Indian Negro novelists since de Lisser have been free from his kind of attitude and from his misinformation about Africa and the African heritage. Season of Adventure is the most significant of the West Indian novels invoking Africa for several reasons: because it does not replace a denigrating excess by a romanticising one; because it embodies a corrective view without making this the novel's raison d'etre; because it is so emphatically a West Indian novel- invoking the African heritage not to make statements about Africa but to explore the troubled components of West Indian nationhood; and because it can be all this simultaneously with possessing the artistic freedom to realise in terms of character the universal implications of the special historical situation out of which it has been written.

Black Albino

It is a sharp drop from Lamming's intensely wrought novel to the wish-fulfilment in Namba Roy's tribal presentation of poetic justice. In Black Albino (1961) Roy combines the theme of the recall of the exiled leader with that of the vindication of the unjustly despised. By merit, Tomase the former Chief returns to favour with the tribe; his albino son, Tamba, proves to his young companions that, in spite of his strange colour, he is a worthy son of a worthy chief. The moral satisfaction in which Roy indulges is to be seen at the end of the novel when Tomaso is allowed, gracelessly, to remind his people of their injustice:

> 'Hear me now!' continued Tomaso, relentlessly. 'My son has not changed the colour of his face since you drove us from the village. Go back to thy huts and tell thy picnies that what you taught them was a lie, that he has the same blood, the same laughter comes from his mouth, the same water in his eyes as they, and only when I have seen with my own eyes that they the little ones, have taken to my child, only then shall I, with my Kisanka, and the two little ones, come back to thy village, and I be thy chief once more. I have spoken!'

Roy's moralising strain is not always as obtrusive as this, but it often leads to and over-sentimental presentation of the oppressed and a vindictive categorisation of the villains in his novel.

But if the novel does not bear probing of this kind, it is a rich bed of African cultural survivals. In the Foreward to Black Albino, Tom Dribers therefore writes:

> I first heard of the Maroons shortly before going to Jamaica some years ago. It was Katherine Dunham, that wonderful impresario of Caribbean dance and song, who told me about them and said that I must visit one of the villages - Accompong - in which a remnant of them still proudly maintained their autonomy and their ancestral traditions. I did so, and shall never forget the strange fascination of that remote hill-village, or the courteous hospitality which seemed to take one back through the centuries.
>
> Katherine Dunham - a qualified anthropologist as well as a woman of the theatre - eagerly traced back to their African origins many of the cultural patterns of the Maroons. By a coincidence, I am writing this forword in West Africa; and around me in real life are so many of the sights and sounds and customs that occur, too, in Namba Roy's story - the cottonwood trees, the delicious paw-paws, women pounding herbs for healing, the greedy ants, the talking drums, the stool of chieftainship ... and so many of the human characteristics, found in his Maroons, that go to make up what is beginning to be called the African personality.

These cultural survivals are well sign-posted in the novel or explicated with varying degrees of self-consciousness. Instead of attempting to catalogue them I shall look at three features - nostalgia for the lost land, the physical descriptions of the African character, and Roy's attempt to fashion an "African" language in the novel. These elements will re-appear in some novels to be looked at afterwards.

The novel opens with Tomaso and five of his men sitting on a mountain top, comparing their new land with the old:

> 'You speak truly, Tahta. This Jamaica is indeed a strange land, with no lions and no animals with hides to break the point of a spear. Some crocodiles it is true, and some snakes and wild hogs; but neither the lightfooted antelope nor asumu, the heavy-footed one, whom the bakra named elephant, have ever set foot on this place.' He sighed as he passed his eyes over the wooded hill above him.
>
> 'True, there are woods here, and the mighty rocks and steep mountains give good hands to our fighting and hiding from the bakra of the plains; but sometimes I long for the forest so thick and high that the face of the sun cannot be seen beneath and where even the mighty asumu, with teeth as tall as a warrior must bellow for fear of getting lost.'

There is some obvious sub-Biblical writing here, but what is interesting is how although Roy is writing in the post-1950 period, he is able to control any impulse to invent an imaginary continent himself by allowing the character to express nostalgia by a recall of common-place things. In fact, the passage does not contain more than a contrast through negatives between the two natural environments. The sigh which does not quite avoid being a stereotyped gesture nevertheless manages to be less melodramatic than it might have been. And in the final sentence ("but sometimes I long ...") the emotion is much more poignant for being expressed in an image of vast enclosure which could by no means be mistaken for an objective declaration of the superiority of the old land to all other lands. What I am arguing, in other words, is that Roy succeeds for the very simple reason that the emotion being expressed is appropriate to the condition of the fictional character, and not a function of the author's sentimentality. The use of negative terms in the contrast intensifies the feeling for the other land but it indicates further an acceptance of the present one, an acceptance which is also implied in the "sometimes" of the "I long" sentences. Roy's Maroons, as the novel shows, are interested in coming to terms with the new land, not in returning to Africa.

In the description of the physique of his Africans, Roy shows a race pride but not race exclusiveness. The references to "the bullnecked one" at the beginning and at the end of the following description prevent us from thinking that any race has the monopoly of beauty:

> He was tall and well proportioned, and though he looked almost slight in build opposite the bullnecked one yet the width of the chief's great shoulders and the power beneath the shiny black skin of his arms and leg muscles showed even in his most relaxed state. He was dressed like his companions in brown loincloth only, and his only distinction was a band of cloth around his forehead which proclaimed him their chief and leader. Everything about him - his nose, lips hair, and colour, proclaimed him a full-blooded son of Africa. As he leaned his head to one side, meeting the eyes of the warrior who had just spoken, his calm and dignity did not seem to please this bullnecked one, judging by the sudden change on the face of the latter.
>
> (Black Albino, pp. 10-11)

This description of the African person, as is obvious from the passage itself, is not a grantuitous one but works naturally in the developing tension between Tomaso and Lago. It is a simple virtue, but sometimes, in the high fever of Negritude, lost sight of. The description of Tomaso's wife Kisanka offers a significant variation and an accommodation, however concealed, to other standards of beauty. Roy seems to enjoy the paradox of a theoretically ugly heroine, but one who is attractive nevertheless to the other characters;

> From her countrymen's view, there would be three things to prevent her being the most beautiful girl in their midst: she was not plump, and her nose and lips, though flat and full as befitting a daughter of Africa, were not flat and full enough to make her the undisputed beauty of the village. Apart from this she would have been voted beautiful by any people of any race, with her largish eyes, graceful neck and figure, and a face tapered beautifully to match. Her hair, bunched together by its fine curls, excluded any doubt of her pure African strain, and her skin with the colour and texture of fine black satin, helped also to confirm this. (Black Albino, pp. 18-19)

It is useful to point out that Kisanka's three "blemishes" draw her closer to a European standard. But I do not think we could accuse the author of Black Albino of being a psychological victim of the devaluative process.

I want to look now at Roy's efforts to suggest an "African" language in English. We are told at the beginning of the novel that Tomaso was "speaking in the tongue of the Bantu"; later we learn that "out of the many dialects in the language of the Bantu the early Maroons had created a common tongue, easy to understand by any son of Africa. Here and there were improvised words, either created by the old leaders themselves or culled from the Spanish, and later the English." One might argue that this is not an inconsistency or that in the emotional context of Tomaso's nostalgic speech, the original pure tongue is appropriate. In the end, however, interest must focus not on the internal logic but on Roy's inventions on the page.

The first characteristic that Roy gives to his Maroon language is personification. Describing a rough sea, Tahta the old bush-doctor says that "the water was bitten with madness. It lifted itself and threw its body against land

as if the land had covered it with insults. It was many days and nights before its anger was spent" (p.9). This is not necessarily African but Roy makes his intention more explicit in a description of the trees of Twin Sisters, where the personification works by analogy with tribal custom: "The aged leaves passed along with dignity and without full, and the young ones, full of respect for their elders, took the places of their predecessors without a blare of horns to announce their coming" (p.52.). Personification of landscape is a characteristic trick of West Indian writers dealing with Africa, and we shall see some more examples later.

For the rest, Roy depends upon Biblical patterns ("It shall be a man-child Tomaso! And none shall call thee childless afterwards" p.23); the use of expletives ("Rejoice with me, O my people!" p.23); vivid periphrasis ("Speak and tell me why I have been spared from the beaks of the vultures" p.12) which are not always appropriate; hyphenated phrases ("brother-with-the-empty-loins" p.12) and words yoked without hyphens ("mouthslayer") that work best in contexts of invective; the use of parables and proverbs ("a ram goat ... tried to fool all the animals in the forest that he was a lion until one day the real lion came and only the horns of the ram were left" p.11); and finally the use of vivid metaphor (Tomaso going "into the bakra's mouth" to get information p.57). In disconnected extracts and in descriptive analysis of technique, Roy's novel seems to be better than it is. Continuous exposure to its simple effects, however, and the underlying moral imperatives mar some good moments. The next work at which I want to look raises some of the problems Roy solved in a workmanlike way. But The Leopard has been acclaimed by critics of West Indian literature. It is admired by C. L. R. James and Wilson Harris. Less formidable figures like Coulthard, Jahn, and J. A. Ramsaran have also seemed to give their approval. Ramsaran does not go beyond the statement that its "language is marked by a freshness and individual quality which cannot be missed by any sensitive reader."[90] Jahnheinz Jahn pronounces that Reid "understands African

---

90. J. A. Ramsaran New Approaches to African Literature (Ibadan University Press, 1965) p.102.

philosophy in all its depth and makes it come to life."[91] And Coulthard says that "whatever the symbolic or allegorical significance of the novel, Reid has tried to pour himself into a completely African character. The background too, naturally, is African."[92] I shall not refer to these views explicitly but it is useful to bear them in mind in what follows.

The Leopard

The Leopard may be seen in two lights. In the first place it is the West Indian novel of imaginary Africa and the African personality par excellence. In the second, and more significantly, it is a precursor of Season of Adventure. I shall deal with its more popular aspect first.

By opting to narrate much of the novel through a series of flash-backs seen from Nebu's point of view, Reid commits himself to projecting his central character's personality from the inside. In doing so he utilises stock ideas of romanticism and primitivism. Like Senghor, and like people who do not come from any of the countries of Africa, Reid refers to Nebu as an "African", and he uses this term in free variation with the word "Negro". Although we learn in Chapter twenty-three that Nebu is "an effigy ... fixed forever in gray stones", and in Chapter thirteen he is "a blue black god squattting quiet beyond comprehension", he is saved for humanity (and as we shall see below, for the msabu Gibson) by the "rich warm blood /that/ was pumping along the African's veins." Indeed, even when asleep he is in rhythmic communion with the earth-force: "His eyes were closed and only the gentle heaving of the blanket showed that life was thereabout. His sleep was in rhythm with the land, and if the rain had ceased or the wind had died, he would have instantly waked" (p.86). Little wonder that when, armed at last with a rifle, he runs to the bush, "the bush was waiting and drew him in with a hundred green arms in heat

---

[91] Mantu p.208.

[92] Coulthard, p.77.

for him" (p.52). Our response to one whole side of Reid is a response to a highly sensuous prose in the service of decadence.

One of the key sections of the novel has to do with the dance at the coming of the rains, a solo performance by Nebu the house-boy in the Gibsons' bedroom. Nebu's dance is interrupted by the entry of a rain-soaked Mrs. Gibson. Intercourse takes place on this highly charged occasion (the only time) and later Mrs. Gibson gives birth to Nebu's son. Since Nebu's relationship with his son is a genuinely imagined human relationship, the one that makes The Leopard more than a self-indulgent exercise in black romanticism, it might be argued that the episode is a functional one. But while admitting this I want to show how Reid uses it for quite other purposes. The passages I would like to quote come from pages 17-19 and from page 21. As quotation is continuous over the first five I shall omit page references after each.

Over the whole stretch of text there are three features that recur: a mystic view of person and place; a vein of sexual imagery of a violent kind; and a mixture of over-writing with superb imaginative effects. The three features cannot exist separately but what I want to follow is the way in which by the last two passages Reid declines into the crudest predictable confrontation with a reduction in the imaginative quality of the writing.

In the first passage, the wind sweeps into the room, the rain draws nearer and then bursts upon the house:

> Vast, cold, furry hands instantly clamped themselves on every inch of his wet naked body. He shivered violently at the first touch and then the bush flesh, that knew the elements with the primary acquaintance of a forest tree, accepted the wind with a gust of soft laughter. His head arrogantly cocked back on the column of ebony throat, Nebu laughed mirthfully. Miles away he heard the swiftly growing roar of the rain as it exploded on the sounding board of this wide and cushioned land. Then the flood struck down on the trees outside and the house fell on his ears.

In sentence two, the coming of the wind is felt by Nebu in a female position as a taking by force ("shivered violently") joyfully accepted after the initial

revulsion. In the same sentence, the "bush flesh that knew ... tree" has to do with the African one-ness with the earth-force; and the slightly illogical "column of ebony throat" in the following sentence is part of Reid's view of the African as sensuous sculpture. In the opening sentence, there is an adjectival overloading, "vast, cold, furry" followed by "wet, naked" but the passage closes with the brilliant "house fell on his ears" to create the sense of the crashing in of the rain upon Nebu's consciousness.

In the next passage, Nebu dances the dance of creation to the thunder of the rains and the whistle of the wind: the final sentence with its repetitive co-ordinate opening clauses (from which the "although" clause breaks to return to the repetitive unifying "all the tribes in all the land") closes with the sonorous place names of "Ethiopia and Uganda to beyond mighty Kilimanjaro." However much we may be aware that Reid is working from a theory of the rhythmic African and of the collective unconscious of the race, it is impossible not to be swept along by the imaginative enactment.

> Nebu flung the squeegee away from him, opened his arms wide and bellowed laughter into the darkly wet void whichhis land had become. And suddenly it was a ngoma, but a ngoma that not the wisest master dancer among the Somali or the Masai or the Kikuyu could conceive. For the thunder of the rains was the drums, the whistle of the wind was the pipes, and although he was the only dancer at this ngoma, he was all the tribes in all the land from the borders of Ethiopia and Uganda to beyond mighty Kilimanjaro.

The trouble with this brilliant evocation, however, is that Reid throws it away on the common-place. The beginning of stylistic collapse can be seen in the over-explicit violence of the sexual imagery of the rains raping the earth:

> He danced full of power and able to perform impossible feats of agility in time to the rhythm of the rain-drums. The wind blowing on his nudity was the sweet-skinned girl whom the elders of the tribe had chosen for him at that half-forgotten Dance of Puberty when he had proved his maleness. Outside the windows the earth was in a joyous uproar beneath the rape of the long rains. The rain found all its hollows and embraced the hillocks. It soaked the trees to the roots.

Although the closing image is what remains in our minds, it is worth noting the felicitous "rain-drums" in sentence one stretching into the "sweet-skinned" used in relation to the girl in the next sentence.

In the fourth passage Nebu's exultation is reduced to a more worldly fingering of female garments:

> Nebu danced nude, narrow-hipped, the strong calves and plough-widened shoulders like dark old wine catching what light there was about. In an odd way as he glided, a tiger grace to his flanks, he seemed to claim the room: running his hand over the bedsheets, touching with his finger-tips the things of hers on the dresser, the lacy small clothes thrown on a chair - and then his dream world lurched. Nebu hooked his head round and stared into the eyes of the woman.

The sexual suggestions of the opening sentence in this passage are caught up in the "sculptured hard young manhood" of the next. The hollows and hillocks of the raped land re-appear in the "shoulder hollows and breasts proud as Babylon" of the White woman:

> She had ridden in through the rainstorm and her clothes were soaked and clung to her horsewoman's body so that she was all long flat legs and shoulder hollows, and breasts proud as Babylon. The water-stiffened felt hat was in her hand. Brown hair flecked with water tumbled to her shoulders. The black, posed catlike on his sprung knees, was sculptured in hard young manhood. With the tip of her tongue, the msabu touched the rainwater on her lips.

Locally, the "water-stiffened felt hat" in the msabu's hand is a brilliant stroke but it is used indiscriminately with the less original rain-soaked clothes and the inviting flick of the tongue over the lips to bring about this climax:

> And even now he remembered the rough thrusts of the msabu's hips when she fought for him to fill her, using the rich language of the body to talk away his fears.

It is clear that Reid wants us to see this event as a re-enactment of the dance by Nebu and the "joyous uproar" of the earth under the rains, fertilisation of the woman by mystic force of Nebu. But what we actually read through the cliches is an unoriginal description of sex on a stormy day. The passage moreover, cannot sustain any other interpretation because we are never taken into the consciousness

of the woman, and because Reid does not even attempt to develop her as a character after what we are being asked to see as almost a cosmic experience.

But if our response to this part of the novel is of imaginative power held back from opening up possibilities by its commitment in the long run to a stereotyped confrontation, Reid moves towards a more interesting parable in the relationship between Nebu and the child born of this congress of Europe and Africa.

When Nebu finds that he has killed Bwana Gibson the man he had wronged many years before, he determines to make restitution by taking back to the town, at great personal risk, the crippled boy who was Gibson's companion. In the ironic situation which Reid develops it is the boy who has the upper-hand. The boy knows that Nebu is his father but he is ashamed of the Kikuyu. Insecure and perverse, he insults and abuses Nebu. Nebu on the other hand, believing that the boy does not know the truth maintains a deeply grieved silence. As they journey through the bush, the boy's ambivalent attitudes to Nebu, and Nebu's desire both to please him and to find value in him displace Reid's previous interest in romanticising the race. Without a conscious authorial striving, the journey in the bush becomes a symbolic journey which reaches its climax in a cave on the outskirts of the town, where with the leopard of hate ready to pounce, Nebu's self-control and his love for the boy, concealed as duty break down the half-bwana's revulsion at last:

> 'Nebu', the boy said softly. The black looked curiously at him.
> 'You love me very much,' the boy said.
> The boy's eyes were opened wide, stretched boldly wide so that they were two huge, strangely lit rooms into which the black almost wandered. Nebu was glad that the great bow on his back snubbed on the threshhold and halted him. His legs were sleek and firm once more and he backed away proudly on them. The negro laughed in his belly; it was unseen on his face.
> 'I love you, toto?' (The Leopard, p.170)

What is impressive about this moment of acknowledgement is the factualness of the presentation, and the way in which in the narrative section Reid moves naturally

from observed and realistic detail ("the boy's eyes were opened wide") to expressive metaphor ("strangely lit rooms ... almost wandered") and back to realistic detail ("the great bow ... halted him"). The legs "sleek and firm" are the dramatic outcome of reconciliation, not the celebrating terms of racialism. Nebu's seeming question carries the unheard sound of human fulfilment. Because of the emotional dynamics in the situation, Reid's most extravagant effects in the following passage remain under strict control:

> 'Father,' the boy said softly, grinning at him.
> Through the soles of his feet, he could hear the ocean at Mombasa. The great waves stood straight up in the water, fifty yards out, and tossed their shaggy heads and roared in and shook the beach in their teeth. (The Leopard, p.171)

So inspired is Reid by the truth of the situation he has created that when later the father-son relationship is broken by the long history of mistrust between them (Nebu will not use the gun because it has failed him once through the half-bwana's trickery) we return to the ironic appropriateness of the "almost" wandering into the strangely lit rooms, and the disruptive presence of "the great bow on his back [which] snubbed on the threshold and halted him." Lamming's Season of Adventure is a more substantial work, than The Leopard. And Lamming operates from the point of view of the alienated character, but it is impossible to avoid the resemblance between Fola and Reid's half-bwana. The Leopard is in its finest aspect a parable on the relationship between alienated West Indian Negro and embarrassing African ancestry.

The Scholar Man and Other Leopards

There are some similarities at first sight between the two novels written by West Indians who have lived in Africa. By coincidence, both Dathorne and Williams come from Guyana, and in the fictions the central characters, Adam Questus (The Scholar Man, 1964) and Dennis Williams' Froad (Other Leopards 1963) are Guyanese on the African continent. Both novels satirise aspects of life in Africa, and in both the central characters move towards resolutions that concern the individual rather than the race or the nation.

Of the two, Dathorne's is the more explicit and the less interesting. Questus comes to Africa in order to claim a distant kinship which will make him whole, but The Scholar Man suffers from Dathorne's disbelief in the dilemma of his mechanically named hero. This is reflected in the pretentiousness of Questus' dialogues with himself, and in Dathorne's easy distraction into cheerful deflations of ex-patriate University staff and self-important native dignitaries. But instead of satirising his hero or making him too a comic figure, Dathorne pretentiously follows his fashionable theme of communion with Africa. This leads to some lurid over-writing locally as for instance when Quested is motoring to a dance: "The dark-green trees kissed the tip of the road, brushed its lip of leaf against the side of the car"; and a few lines later: "The night ran beside the car like a tiger on the edge of the forests, as dark as sleep, and naked like a black man spitting out his soul"; and two sentences on: "The headlights undressed the folds of dark, and the car pricked at the womb of virgin night." (p.146). Dathorne's actual knowledge of Africa does not seem to have cured such bad taste. But it is at the conclusion that the quest for origins leads to the worst kind of mystification. By some quite arbitrary strokes in characterisation, Dathorne converts the tarty daughter of the Head of the English Department into a soul-mate for the hero. Adam and Helen plan to meet in England where they will have a more familiar feel for the surroundings. (The point, it seems here, is that the West Indian is more English than African.) But before this can take place, Questus drives into the night and has intercourse with an outcast mud-woman:

> Then the rain fell and he lay lost in this, his third baptism of mud and water; and he lay flat clutching her, feeling the shape of her huge breasts and the rain tickled his eyes and smoothed his face and the blessing of water poured down his mouth and his nostrils and the lightning itched and thunder eased and the wind blanketed them; and in the madness of that rainy moment, in the slush and the lighted dark, the wet and the testimony of thunder, he knew. (The Scholar Man, p.180)

Relying on the repetition of "and", the incantatory use of words like "baptism" "water", "lightning" and "thunder" and the conclusive placing of "he knew", Dathorne wishes to suggest that his hero has returned to the rejected earth rhythms of the pre-expatriate Africa. But this attitude to the continent is not very different from the one displayed in Reid's extravaganza quoted earlier, and it is much less skilfully written. Since the symbolism of the woman is never suggested elsewhere in the novel, (she is realistically described on page 140 where she provokes disgust) and since this incident seems to take place quite gratuitously, the reader is left mystified. Questus "knew", and so presumably does Dathorne, but neither can tell, for this is the end of the novel.

Williams' central character, Froad declares his problems in the first two pages of Other Leopards.

> I am a man, you see, plagued by these two names, and this is their history: Lionel the who I was, dealing with Lobo the who I continually felt I ought to become, this chap, this alter ego of ancestral times that I was sure quietly slumbered behind the cultivated mask. Now on that afternoon I came consciously to sense the thing that has made this story: that not enviable state of being, the attitude of involuntary paralysis that made them know me in Africa - the more intelligent that is - as the Uncommitted African. (Other Leopards, pp. 19-20)

The first point to notice in this is that Williams gives up the easy possibility of leading his character from hope to dramatic disillusion. The novel opens with the sense of disorientation.

Williams' purpose in narrating the novel through Froad's consciousness is clearly to explore this disturbing state: "The past was ashes; a mystical future sending wave-impulses back to a hopeless past" (p.74). Froad's comment on the political slogan "Africa will be free" is a comment on himself which becomes a direct judgment when egged on by Hughie his methodical English superior, he tries to appropriate the past in the gold figurine of Queen Amanishakatee, and fails:

... I wished for words to assault those stone ears with some claim of my very own, mine, me! But time passed, wind blew, sand settled, gloom deepened, and I could think of nothing; nothing at all ... I knew now, with the relief of a criminal accepting the process of law, that I had to condemn myself. That was that! What could Hughie's measurements and contrivings mean to me now; ever! There was no man, no brother, no Mother of Time, no people, nobody. There were only vessels; whole or broken, full or empty. At the heart of the mirage there was no water.
(Other Leopards, p.155)

Froad's tension arises from his longing to escape this inner sense of hollowness and his ruthless honesty in resisting what he despises in some moods as sham consolations in politics, religion, love, or tradition. Thus he vaccillates between supporting Muslim Negroes and helping Christian Negroes; between admiring the certainty of his compatriot from Guyana, Chief, and despising the older man's missionary attitude; he is impotent before Catherine the Welsh girl who offers to mother him, and Eve the sensuous Guyanese whose appeal is the appeal of "dark silent creek-water" and sullen impenetrability. Above all, it is in Froad's violent swinging from hate to love for Hughie the master of events that Williams seeks to reveal the shattered being of his fraudulent man. Although Froad is at some points the agent of Williams' satire, the total impression of the character that is conveyed is of utter cynicism and longing:

Catherine and her granite hillsides and ruins and legends and history flitted through my mind. Now what the hell does it really feel like? Hughie and his traditions and his burden and his conscientious fanaticism. The Chief and his certainty and his duty and truth and all that. Every man a place! I'm like the bloody scavengers; no shadow. (Other Leopards, p.96)

The power of Williams' novel is the power to suggest in concrete terms the menace and the comfort of discovering origins. Its honesty leads to a conclusion that is in stark contrast to the bogus exoticism of Dathorne's consummation for Questus. By the end of Other Leopards the need for flight is concretely established but the central character has become a lunatic:

Now, having removed my body and the last traces of it, I am without context clear. Going up this new tree, picking the thorns bare, one by one, I am in a darkness nowhere at all. I am nothing, nowhere.

> This is something gained.... Hughie has not found me; I have outwitted him. I have achieved a valuable state: a condition outside his method.... Only remains now to remove my consciousness. This I can do whenever I wish. I am free of the earth. I do not need to go down there for anything. (Other Leopards, pp. 221 and 222)

Froad's madness is evident in the impossibility of what he claims to have done to his body and to be able to do with his particular consciousness. The agitated, repetitive sentences act out the obsessive nature of his desire for escape and annihilation; the negative satisfaction of outwitting Hughie makes it impossible for us to imagine that the passage represents the purity of spiritual aspiration. It is a measure of Williams' triumph that although the novel is set in Africa, and works through African raw material, it is the universal dimension of Froad's case, the abortive quest for origins, that emerges from the art of this fiction.

CHAPTER IV

Language

Another approach which has made the literature of the West Indies part of a wider unit is conveniently illustrated by the publication Terranglia: The Case for English as World Literature[1]. Professor Jones' project attempts to cope with all the new literatures in English which have developed visibly in the first half of the twentieth century:

> When we talk about English (meaning British) literature, we are talking about a segment. When we add American literature, we have added only another segment. Until we are prepared to think of English as a world language expressing itself in a world literature we shall be getting farther and farther out of date. If we are to study "English" literature - that is the literature of the English language - let us study all of it; every bit of it that has a legitimate claim to attention.[2]

This effort to make things bigger if not better is severely limited by arbitrary regional groupings, and by an undiscriminating disposition of authors in these groups. It is absurd to find Mabel M. A. Chan-Toon, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Sir Henry S. Cunningham in a region called "India-Pakistan-Ceylon-Burma" for all the qualification that they are "Older writers". It serves no purpose to place Joseph Conrad, "Han Suyin" and Alec Waugh in a section called "Malaysia-Hong Kong". But worse than Terranglia's bibliographic follies are its serious misconceptions about what is meant by "the use of English".

It is necessary to make the distinction that in some areas like the West Indies and Australia, English or a version of it is the first language. In the latter situation at least two kinds of possibilities have to be borne in mind. Firstly, there may be difficulties of expression arising from an inadequate grasp of basic features in the language - as when in Amos Tutuola's The Palm - Wine Drinkard (1954) the drinkard says "I lied down there awoke" (p.14). Although in

---

[1]Joseph Jones Terranglia: The Case for English as World Literature (N.Y.: Twayne Publishers 1965).

[2]Terranglia, p.20

Tutuola's fiction it is not always possible to distinguish between a deliberately ungrammatical usage and what might be just an accident which happens to be effective ("they were rolling on the ground as if a thousand petrol drums were pushing along a hard road" p.22), it is nevertheless, necessary to be aware that the distinction sometimes can be made.

The last example from Tutuola leads us into the second broad possibility that must be considered. An author who thinks in one language instinctively and can write in another is liable to modify the adopted language. A certain amount of this may be done unconsciously, but the Nigerian, Gabriel Okara has made an explicit statement on the matter:

> As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folk-lore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer, into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions .....
> .....
> a writer can use the idioms of his own language in a way that is understandable in English.[3]

In his novel, The Voice (1964) Okara puts his principle into practice, drawing upon his native Ijaw. Three quotations may help us to see some of the advantages and some of the limitations of the kind of dubbing Okara proposes. The first, from the end of the novel, does not seem to me to carry any marks necessarily derived from the native language:

> When day broke the following day it broke on a canoe aimlessly floating down the river. And in the canoe tied together back to back with their feet tied to the seats of the canoe, were Ikolo and Tuare. Down they floated from one bank of the river to the other like debris, carried by the current. Then the canoe was drawn into a whirlpool. It spun round and round and was slowly drawn into the core and finally disappeared. And the water rolled over the top and the river flowed smoothly over it as if nothing had happened. (The Voice, p.157)

---

[3]Gabriel Okara "African Speech ... English Words" in Transition 10, Vol. 3, 1963. Published from Ibadan, Nigeria.

From this, and other passages like it in the novel we can conclude that Okara does not follow his program as fanatically as his article in Transition suggests.

The next passage contains examples of the novel's most obtrusive "translation" feature. For in this extract, as in the novel as a whole, most sentences have a verb form as their final word:

> It was the day's ending and Okolo by a window stood. Okolo stood looking at the sun behind the tree tops falling. The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun, like a dying away memory. It was like an idol's face, no one knowing what is behind. Okolo at the palm trees looked. They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed. Egrets, like white flower petals strung slackly across the river, swaying up and down, were returning home. And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling. (The Voice, p.13)

It takes a while to get used to the grammar of Okara's novel to the point where a sentence like "Okolo at the palm trees looked" becomes normal, and it is arguable that a non-Ijaw reader cannot help being irritated by continuous exposure to such "abnormal" structures where no special effects are being aimed at, but on the credit side no reader can resist the aptness of "falling" in sentence two or fail to register the peculiar inevitability with which "paddling" completes the brilliant evocation of "canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands".

In the next passage, Okolo is given protection in the hut of the girl, Tuere, who had been driven out of the town previously on the allegation that she was a witch. With the mob outside, Okolo revolved past events in his mind:

> Inside the hut Okolo stood, hearing all the spoken words outside and speaking with his inside. He spoke with his inside to find out why this woman there behaved thus. He knew her story only too well. She had been a girl of unusual habits, keeping to herself and speaking to herself. She did not flirt with boys though she had a hunger-killing beauty. So it was the insides of everyone that perhaps she had not the parts of a woman. They did not, because of these her strange behaviours call her a witch. They openly called her a witch when her mother and father died one after the other within a few weeks and after every young man who proposed to her died one after the other. All these Okolo remembered. He also remembered how in a circle of strong eyes and strong faces she stood being accused of taking witchcraft to kill her father and mother. They then from the town drove her. His inside then smelled had for the town's people and for himself for not being fit to do anything on her behalf. (The Voice, p.20)

The physical rightness of "inside" in the final sentence does not, I think, cancel out our impression that the word appears (my italics) only as a result of Okara's modish insistence. Certainly, in sentence one it is impossible to avoid feeling that the author is being clever. However that may be, Okara's "translation" principle seems to produce an extraordinarily vivid effect in the sentence "He also remembered how in a circle of strong eyes and strong faces she stood being accused ...".

In Achebe's novels there is a tighter artistic control over the incursions from the native language into English, but I do not want to illustrate this at any length. I shall take a convenient and authoritative example from Transition No. 18 (1965) where in an article "English and the African Writer" Chinua Achebe himself writes:

> Allow me to quote a small example from Arrow of God which may give some idea of how I approach the use of English. The Chief Priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church:
>
> I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something then you will bring back my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying 'had we known' tomorrow.
>
> Now supposing I had put it another way. Like this for instance:
>
> I am sending you as my representative among those people - just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the White man may well regret their lack of foresight.
>
> The material is the same. But the form of the one is in character and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct but judgment comes into it too.

Tutuola, Okara and Achebe differ from one another as artists, but these three writers are able to draw upon resources in their social situation which do not exist for writers who do not have English as a second language.

However in areas where English is a second language, the fiction produced in that tongue is not always the natural expression of a whole society. And it may be limited by local factors like the alternative literatures being produced in

native languages; the number of people able to read English and what proportion of the total they represent; and the attitude of national governments to the foreign tongue. In Pakistan, to take one example, the existence of classics and highly developed written literatures in native languages have largely determined and fixed a process of compartmentalisation:

> Though the English newspapers and journals print stories and poems at least once a week, generally writers like to write in Urdu and Bengali rather than in English. Our best writers do not like to write creative literature in English. English is reserved for journalism, official use, use in law-courts and, occasionally, for literary criticism. In other words, it is treated as a medium mainly for non-literary communication and very rarely for creative self-expression.[4]

Pakistani writing in English is unlikely to become important at a national level. In Nigeria, on the other hand, in spite of some nationalistic demands in literary magazines that a local language should be used, the possibilities for the writer using English are enormous. "Nigeria", writes a professional linguist, "with a population of perhaps 48 million has according to conservative estimates, as many as 150 languages, none of which is spoken by more than six million people."[5] In this huge artificial ex-colony a Nigerian professional writer seeking a large audience, or a nationalist author committed to the task of helping to create a national consciousness has the strongest of incentives to write in English. Because there is no indigenous literary tradition in written form to which the writer may be drawn to contribute, a tradition in English stands at least an equal chance with any other language in Nigeria both for expressing modern Nigerian experience (Achebe and Ekwensi) or for the re-casting of folk material (Tutuola).

Questions like these hardly arise in the West Indies. For the modern West Indian writer there is no possibility of a choice between English and another language. English is his native tongue and he uses it as a matter of course.

---

[4]S. A. Ashraf "The Study of English Literature in Pakistan" in Commonwealth Literature, ed. John Press (1965) p.139.

[5]John Spencer in Commonwealth Literature, p.116.

I should like to look briefly at how this has come about.

English in the West Indies: "Bad English"

A description by Edward Long in The History of Jamaica (1774) is a convenient point from which to look backwards at the way in which English became established among Negroes in the West Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The same description has a shape which helps us to anticipate the fluidity of the twentieth century situation:

> The Africans speak their respective dialects with some mixture of broken English. The language of the Creoles is bad English, larded with the Guiney dialect, owing to their adopting African words in order to make themselves understood by the imported slaves; which they find easier than teaching these strangers to learn English. The better sort are very fond of improving their language by catching at any hard word that the Whites happen to let fall in their hearing; and they alter and misapply it in a strange manner; but a tolerable collection of them gives an air of knowledge and importance in the eyes of their brethren, which tickles their vanity and makes them more assiduous in stocking themselves with this unintelligible jargon. ... This sort of gibberish likewise infects many of the White Creoles, who learn it from their nurses in infancy and meet with much difficulty, as they advance in years, to shake it entirely off and express themselves with correctness.[6]

To the three stages of "Englishness" outlined by Long we have to add a fourth - the Standard English which he uses as a criterion of correctness. Individual Negroes had attained competence in this fourth type in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but it is only in the twentieth century, as a result of the establishment of popular education in the islands that we can speak of a class of educated speakers of English from among the Negroes and other Black elements in the population. I would like to argue later that when this happens we have to propose a category called "West Indian Standard", but it is necessary first to look at the earlier periods.

The three stages contained in Long's description help us to reconstruct the process by which English displaced the African dialects and became the basis of

---

[6]Edward Long The History of Jamaica (1774) Book III Chapter 3 pp. 426-427.

the language of West Indian Negroes. As the quotation shows, the stages may co-exist at any given time especially in the pre-Emancipation period when there was a continuous supply of newly-arrived Africans. But we might dispose them chronologically by focusing on the language of the groups among which, at each point in time, the process of substitution was most advanced. The further back in time we go, the greater the number of Africanisms we find in the language of these groups; as we move forward, the degree of Englishness increases.

In the first stage, African dialects predominate with only a mixture of broken English. As there is little evidence, we have to speculate about how the stage actually began, and we have to set a hypothetical point at which a new stage would have begun. A fifty year unit seems convenient since it covers at least two generations. Taking Jamaica as our field, this would bring us to the end of the seventeenth century. To make orders and instructions understood, the Whites would have had to invent a species of essential English, partly made up of a number of formulaic words and phrases, and in general, showing fewer inflexional variations than would occur in exchanges between Whites. There would, however, be a compensatory increase in the reliance upon the extra-linguistic context, upon the word order of the simplified English and upon intonation to make necessary discriminations and to fill out meaning. One cannot help invoking the existence of an abbreviated language along these lines as one of the sources of the meagre infexional content, and the heavy reliance upon syntactic directives in West Indian dialects of the twentieth century. However this may be, I would suggest that traces of a minimal English invented for practical purposes became lodged in the language of the slaves at an early period, and that in the slave context there would have been considerable motivation to pick up and practice the prestige language of the masters. We know that slavery was a scale by which all things African were devalued.

Only such pressure can account for the rapid transformation which had taken place by the early eighteenth century. Among the slaves born in the island as the following quotation shows, stage two was well under way: "The Slaves are brought from several Places in Guiney, which are different from one another in Language and consequently they can't converse freely ... 'Tis true the Creolian Negroes are not of this Number: They all speak English."[7]

Continued motivation to learn the language of the master had fed on slightly increased social contact and the exposure to a wider range of English. Three points of contact may be located. The system restricted intercourse with the upper orders of the plantation hierarchy but there was more freedom in the association between slaves and the overseers and book-keepers at the lower end of the White social structure. There was general routine contact with the group, particular meetings with the Negro 'driver' for passing on instructions, and intimacies contracted with slave women. Domestic slaves and personal attendants were exposed to a wider range of situations than field slaves, although it is worth remembering that not all the Creole ladies were literate. We can imagine that the largely individual contacts on the two levels so far mentioned would have had some influence on the language of the participants and that the "improvement" made by the slave would have been transmitted in some form to his or her immediate circle. But the most significant contact, because it would appear to have been between groups was that between the Negroes and the White indentured servants[8] (mainly Irish and Scottish) in the seventeenth century and in the first half of the eighteenth. Leslie writes of these servants being ruined by combining with the

---

[7]Charles Leslie A New and Exact Account of Jamaica (1739). Quotation from Letter X p.327 of the Third Edition of 1740.

[8]Leslie gives an account of the deficiency laws of 1703 which demanded inter alia that "Every Master of Slaves, for the first five working Slaves, shall be obliged to keep one White Man-servant, Over-seer or hired Man, for three months at least, and for ten Slaves, two Whites, and for every 10 more, one; to be resident in the Plantation where the Negroes are employed." (See p.214).

Negroes: "The great Thing which ruins most of these unfortunate Fellows, is the combining with the Negroes who tell them many pausible stories to engage them to betray their Trust."[9] and Long (1774), describing them as "the very dregs of the three kingdoms" states that they used to seduce the wives of the slaves and that the "better sort of Creole Blacks disdain to associate with them."[10]

Since there was no formal teaching of any kind, and since the models from which the slaves picked up what they could were themselves degenerate ones, it is not surprising that slave English was "bad English". Imperfect learning, imperfect forgetting, and the necessary fraternisation with newly-arrived Africans ensured that this "bad English" would be "larded with Guiney dialect":

> The Negroes seem very fond of reduplications, to express a greater or less quantity of anything; as walky-walky, talky-talky, washy-washy, happy-happy, tie-tie, lilly-lilly, fum-fum: to, bug-a-bugs (wood-ants) dab-a-dab (an olio made with maize, herring and pepper) bra-bra (another of their dishes) grande-grande (augmentative, size or grandeur) and so forth. In their conversations they confound all the moods, tenses, cases and conjunctions without mercy; for example, I surprize (for I am surprized) me glad for see you (I am glad to see you) how you do (for how d'ye do!) me tank you; me ver well; etc.[11]

The point I want to emphasise, however, is that in stage two, in contrast to stage one, the base of the language is already English. Stage two seems to mark the period when we can begin to speak about Creole English, since the new-combination is both English-based and literally island-born. From this point however the history of the Creole is a history of steady reduction in the number of obvious Africanisms. What I have called the third stage begins in earnest. According to F. G. Cassidy, an editor of the authoritative Dictionary of Jamaican English (1966):

> ... There is no real evidence ... that any articulate African speech survives in any community in the island today, and it is doubtful whether any has been spoken at all within the twentieth century. A few snatches of African or

---

[9]Leslie p.320

[10]Long, Book III, Chapter 3, p.416.

[11]Long, Book III, Chapter 3, p.427.

> African-like words are preserved in some songs and some of the revivalist cults keep up a terminology among themselves that has African elements, but these are all vestiges in a structure that is not genuinely African, but Jamaican ...[12]

This is not a denial of African influence on the new combination. For while Creole English was appearing to draw closer to Standard English in vocabulary, its grammar remained something different:

> Although it is evident that this, as every other corrupted form of language, is spoken by no previously well-planned system, yet as in course of time, every corruption resolves itself into certain very plain and distinct ones, which are, in not a few instances, in direct opposition to those of the pure parent language.[13]

Thomas Russell's The Etymology of Jamaican Grammar appeared in 1868. Russell is committed to a notion of correctness but his position was revolutionary in his time. I shall return to attempts to work out a grammar for Creole English, and some of their implications later. More widely held than Russell's view in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries however is the one, encouraged by the reduction of obvious Africanisms, and by the closeness of vocabularies, that Creole English was simply bad English, spoken mainly by Negroes but sometimes by uneducated White Creoles.

By the time that Lady Nugent was keeping her Jamaica journal indeed we are told that

> ... The Creole Language is not confined to the negroes. Many of the ladies, who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting. I stood next to a lady one night near a window, and, by way of saying something, remarked that the air was much cooler than usual; to which she answered, 'Yes, ma-am, him rail-y too fra-ish.'[14]

With Lady Nugent's comment we are reminded that however fluid the situation may in fact have been, the crude ruling generalisation of pre-Emancipation society was that there were two main varieties of English - the language of the illiterate

---

[12] F. G. Cassidy Jamaica Talk (1961) p.20

[13] Quoted by Cassidy in Jamaica Talk p.

[14] Lady Nugent's Journal (1839): entry for 24 April, 1802. See p.132 of 1907 edition.

Negro and the language of the literate master. But it follows from the limited social contact of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the grammar of slave English could neither be recognised nor generated by non-speakers of it. This gives great interest to the attempts of British writers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to represent "Negro English" in their fictions. The way in which "Negro English" became associated with certain stereotypes of the Negro is another concern of the next section. Both have bearings on modern West Indian writing.

The first example I would like to look at comes from a work by a writer who had actually been to the West Indies. In Tom Cringle's Log (1829), the prying narrator describes the behaviour of a Negro grave-digger left alone with a corpse and with the food and drink intended as an offering to the dead man's duppy (spirit):

> I noticed he kept looking towards the east, watching as I conjecture, the first appearance of the morning star, but it was as yet too early.
> He lifted the gourd with the pork, and took a large mouthful.
> 'How is dis? I can't put dis meat in Quacco's coffin, dere is salt in the pork; Duppy can't bear salt.'
> Another large mouthful.
> 'Duppy hate salt too much.'
> He ate it all up, and placed the empty gourd in the coffin. He then took up the one with boiled yam in it, and tasted it also.
> 'Salt here too - who de debil do such a ting? Must not let Duppy taste dat.'
> He discussed this also, placing the empty vessel in the coffin, as he had done with the other. He then came to the calabash with the rum. There is no salt here, thought I.
> 'Rum! ah Duppy love rum - if it be well strong. Let me see - Massa Niger, who put water in dis rum eh? No no, never touch dat.'
> Here he finished the whole and placed the empty vessel beside the others; then gradually sank back on his hams, and his eyes starting from the sockets, as he peered up into the tree, apparently at some terrible object.[15]

Scott's comic purpose is well served by his invented dialect. But there are two features of the passage that are of general interest. The first is the association of dialect with the stereotype of the Comic Negro. The second has to do with the

---

15Michael Scott Tom Cringle's Log (1829). Quotation from Vol. 1, pp. 219-220 of the 1894 edition in two volumes by Gibbings and Co. Ltd. The incident quoted follows a hilarious account of a Negro funeral in which it is possible to trace African cultural survivals.

gap between the language of the narrator and the language of the fictional character. Bearing both of these in mind will help us to mark some significant points of growth in West Indian fiction. For as we shall see, the dialect is used in so many different human contexts by West Indian writers that it has been freed of the stereotype. And in different ways there has been a steady closing of the gap between the language of the narrator and the language of the fictional characters.

Another example of the use of dialect comes from the work of a writer who never visited the West Indies. The connection is not a necessary one but in this passage the dialect is totally invented and it is unconvincing.

> White man tie me mother, and force her and me brother Tankey board ship, and bring them and sell them to me master: me mother take sick, and no able to work; so she sit down; white man see her, and whip me mother, whip her very much, and make her work; when he turn away she so sick she no able to stand, she sit down again; but white man, cruel white man, again see her, and whip her much, very much, till blood run. Tankey see it, me see it; me cry; Tankey no bear it: he come softly behind white man, and with big stone he knock him down; he make him dead; other white mans see Tankey and take him and hang him up by leg to tree, and whip him till he all bloody and blood run upon the ground ...[16]

Dorothy Kilner's The Rotchfords (1786) from which the passage comes has elements of both the anti-slavery and the cult of feeling traditions so its purpose should be evident. But there are again two features that I want to point out for the way in which they help us to measure the uses of dialect in West Indian writing. Miss Kilner's uncomplicated sentences with their monosyllabic words, their single tense, and their repetition to suggest paucity of vocabulary are intended to represent the simple speech of a simple man. I shall want to show later how West Indian writers have complicated dialect to achieve less limited ends than British writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

---

[16]Cited by Wylie Sypher in Guinea's Captive Kings (University of North Carolina Press, 1942) See pp. 276-277.

The two examples I have looked at reflect a limited knowledge of dialect and a limited conception of its possible artistic uses, the two opted for coinciding with an external and stereotyped approach to the Negro. These were typical of British fictional representations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But that they were not inevitable may be argued from an interesting exception in William Godwin's St. Leon (1799) where the novelist-philosopher not only presents an unstereotyped Negro but protests against the habit of inventing a vulgar language to represent the socially inferior being. St. Leon, the hero, tries to bribe the gaoler, Hector:

> 'My good friend, are not you poor?'
> 'Yes, sir.'
> 'Would not you readily do me a kindness?'
> 'If my master give me leave, I will.'
> 'You mistake me. Would you be my friend?'
> 'I do not know what you mean, sir. I have been used to call the man I love my friend. If you mean that, you know I cannot choose whether I will be a man's friend; it comes of itself.'
> 'Can I not make you my friend?'
> 'That is, make me love you?'
> I was surprised at the propriety of his answere. I am unable at this distance of time to recall the defects of his language: and I disdain the mimic toil of inventing a jargon for him suitable to the lowness of his condition: the sense of what he said I faithfully report.[17]

Although this is lifeless fiction, it is fiction conscious of the possibilities of life. But in 1799, it is still a hundred and fifty years before the folk become full human beings in literature. When they do so, the "jargon" invented for them will also have arrived. In the last part of this chapter I shall examine dialect in West Indian fiction. But before I do so the ground must be prepared by a description of the contemporary linguistic situation.

The Contemporary Linguistic Situation

There are varieties of West Indian dialect from island to island, but there are certain broad features in common, and it is to these that I refer in speaking

---

[17] William Godwin St. Leon (1799) Quotation from pp. 234-235 of the edition of 1831.

about a West Indian linguistic situation. Once this is said it is convenient to concentrate on one territory. Since recent discussions have focused on Jamaica it makes for some continuity of exploration to choose the same field.

In the twentieth century we have to give up the notion of separate languages (Creole English and Standard English) and we have to envisage a scale. At one end of the scale is what we have been calling "Standard English". In the strictest sense, Standard English (SE) is the language of British ex patriates but quite apart from whether it is actually practiced in the islands, it exercises a powerful influence. It exists as an ideal form to be aspired towards by mentally colonised West Indians, and it is the unknown norm by which even the illiterate measure social standing. An observant novelist V. S. Naipaul provides a comic illustration. In The Mystic Masseur (1957), Ganesh the mystic hero begins a small campaign:

> One day he said, 'Leela, is high time we realise that we living in a British country and I think we shouldn't be shame to talk the people language good.'
> Leela was squatting at the kitchen chulha, coaxing a fire from dry mango twigs. Her eyes were red and watery from the smoke. 'All right, man.'
> 'We starting now self, girl.'
> 'As you say, man.'
> 'Good. Let me see now. Ah, yes. Leela, have you lighted the fire? No, just gimme a chance. Is "lighted" or "lit" girl?'
> 'Look, ease me up, man. The smoke going in my eye.'
> 'You ain't paying attention girl. You mean the smoke is going in your eye.' (The Mystic Masseur, p.72)

At this point in the novel, Leela is too concerned with life to bother about language but with Ganesh's success and new importance, Leela becomes a lady:

> Every day Leela became more refined. She often went to San Fernando to visit Soomintra, and to shop. She came back with expensive saris and much heavy jewellery. But the most important change was in her English. She used a private accent which softened all harsh vowel sounds; her grammar owed nothing to anybody, and included a highly personal conjugation of the verb to be.
> She told Suruj Mooma. 'This house I are building I doesn't want it to come like any erther Indian house...' (The Mystic Masseur, p.150)

Even beyond Leela and Ganesh, at the furthest end of the linguistic scale and living in remote areas are the unschooled speakers of a number of closely related dialects that are the twentieth century continuations of Creole English. The basic features are no different from those Thomas Russell had recognised in the language of the folk and had sought to describe in The Etymology of Jamaican Grammar (1868). But in the hundred year interval, what was the language of the majority has become the language of a minority.

With the establishment of popular education in the latter half of the nineteenth century we can trace the beginnings of a new connection on the grammatical level between the upper reaches of Creole English and Standard English. Once this connection was made the long retreat of Creole as a separate language to its present minority position had begun. Another consequence of the connection was a multiplication of what I have called earlier "stages or degrees of Englishness". The emergent levels of dialect can be ranged in a continuous scale between Standard English and residual or hard core Creole. At opposite ends we seem to have two different languages but they move towards each other by mutually intelligible degrees.

It is hard core Creole which is analysed by Beryl Loftman Bailey in Jamaican Creole Syntax: A Transformational Approach (1966). Miss Bailey uses the term "Jamaican Creole" to cover what we have been calling "Creole English". Miss Bailey seems to be inconsistent, however, since she adopts more rigid criteria for purposes of pure grammatical analysis than in the different activity of estimating the number of speakers of Jamaican Creole. The coherent system she produces in her analysis would have been impossible if she had seriously held the position declared in the 'Introduction' to her grammar: "There is a hard core - the unschooled ranging from pre-school children to the elderly ... but if we take into consideration the fact that every native-born Jamaican

understands some form of Creole, an estimate of a million speakers would not be extravagant...". This seems to be an excessive estimate which can only be accounted for by Miss Bailey's committment to a view of Creole as a quite distinct language from Standard English and to her belief in an ur-Creole, "some kind of Proto-Creole" whose "prior existence in the Old World" and relexification in the New has spawned a knot of related Creole languages in the Caribbean area:

> By Jamaican Creole I mean the English-based Creole spoken throughout the island of Jamaica alongside the officially recognised English. It is a 'Mischsprache' in which the syntax represents the mixing of two related syntactic types - one English, the other some kind of Proto-Creole and the lexicon is predominantly English.[18]

In an earlier section I have proposed a theory of the origin of Creole English: I would suggest further, with Cassidy, that other Creoles developed under analogous conditions, hence their structural affinities:

> But structure is not everything and even the marked differences of grammar and sounds are not enough to over balance the large part of Jamaican folk speech that is English. If it is Creole, it is still English Creole as distinct from Spanish or French Creole. It coexists with English and the two have more in common than apart.[19]

I want therefore to return to the concept of a linguistic scale and the fluid situation which even Miss Bailey recognises (see pp. 1-2 of Jamaican Creole Syntax) to explain what is meant by "West Indian Standard" and to suggest its significance for West Indian fiction.

West Indian Standard (WIS) lies nearest to Standard English (SE) on the linguistic scale in the islands. Its vocabulary is the same as that of SE but with the addition of a small number of West Indianisms[20] which have passed from the

---

[18] Jamaican Creole Syntax (1966) p.1.

[19] F. G. Cassidy Jamaica Talk (1961) p.406.

[20] Formed by analogy from the term "Jamaicanism" used and defined by F. G. Cassidy in Jamaica Talk (1961) thus: "Most obviously this term would include any word, meaning or feature of grammar, idiom or pronunciation that has originated in Jamaica, or has been adopted here from a foreign source. It should also include any similar element that has survived in this island after dying elsewhere, or which has received a decidedly higher degree of use in Jamaica than elsewhere. Putting this into a more rational order, we may classify Jamaicanisms as belonging to five main types: preservations, borrowings, new formations, transferred meanings, and special preferences" (p.3). The definition of "West Indianism" would be the same.

dialects into educated usage. The grammar of WIS is practically the same as that of SE. In their written forms, therefore, SE and WIS are almost indistinguishable. The most obvious differences between SE and WIS exist on the level of actual pronunciation. In Jamaica Talk, Cassidy equates Jamaican Standard [a variant of WIS] with the way educated Jamaicans pronounce Standard English. I will want to make the definition a little more exclusive than that but Cassidy's impressionistic description of Jamaican pronunciation gives an idea of how one variant of WIS sounds:

> The educated Jamaican pronounces Standard English as well as the educated man anywhere - that is to say, according to his personal lights and attitudes, his interests and the impression of himself that he may seek to establish. Like everybody else he will have his local differences, yet no more of those necessarily than the educated Irishman, Welshman or Scot - or for that matter, than the educated Englishman who is not from the 'home counties.' These local differences are heard in Jamaica in individual words and turns of phrase, but perhaps most strikingly as a pattern of intonation and accentuation that is often very different from the levelness of many Americans on the one hand, or the hilliness of many Englishmen on the other. Jamaican speech is more accidented: it goes up and down more frequently, and by sharper rises and falls. In short, it has a decided and characteristic lilt, the origin of which we shall discuss in a moment.[21]

In the next paragraph, Cassidy recognises a connection between the pronunciation in WIS and the pronunciation of the dialects. The one is only a less accidented relation of the other. At the point therefore where WIS resembles SE least, it is closest to the dialects.

Using the resemblance in pronunciation as a starting-point it is tempting to argue that there is an organic connection between the dialects and WIS. But this is only an intuition which would need more evidence, more delicacy of analysis, and more expertise than can be mustered here. If such an organic connection did exist, however, we might have been able to attribute to it some of the features of repetition and other rhythmic effects which seem to occur spontaneously in the narrative sections of West Indian novels, for we could argue that these are natural

---

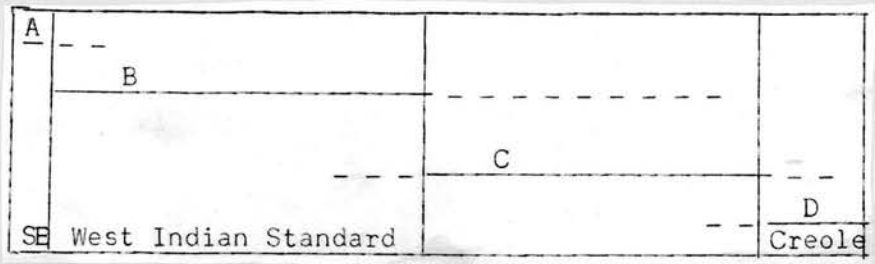
[21] Jamaica Talk, p.26.

incursions from the oral tradition of the dialects. On a straight linguistic level we would have to recognise that while WIS includes SE spoken by educated West Indians its dialect roots make it more distinguished from SE than it usually is. But my interest is less to advocate a distinctive linguistic variety than to describe a new class of speakers in whose usage the notion of an organic connection between WIS and the dialects may be validated.

I would propose the following criteria for recognising speakers of West Indian Standard: they have been sufficiently educated to control the grammar and lexis of Standard English; they may learn to pronounce in other ways, but they retain ability to pronounce in their natural WIS way; above all however they are more or less instinctive speakers of or thinkers in a West Indian dialect or dialects. The third criterion suggests that the speaker of West Indian Standard is an educated West Indian whose social origin is in the dialect-speaking group or whose social contacts make him a dialect-speaker.

These criteria neither increase nor diminish the number of speakers of WIS, but they help us to understand why the most distinctive speakers come from the Black or Coloured educated classes; the criteria also help us to see why such a class of speakers could not emerge as a class until the twentieth century. For until the effects of popular education could be felt, the numbers would be too small, and until there was a change in the social and psychological conditions, the Black or Coloured West Indian who was educated would be more than likely to seek to eliminate his dialect facility and imitate SE.

The range of the speaker of WIS and a summary of the West Indian linguistic situation are represented in the following diagram. The divisions are arbitrary but it is the general shape that I wish to impress.



Vertical lines create linguistic divisions but these are not mutually exclusive. Horizontal lines indicate classes of speakers: broken portions indicate fluidity.
A = Speakers of Standard English B = Speakers of West Indian Standard
C = Speakers of Dialect D = Speakers of Creole

Speakers of WIS have a wide linguistic range. West Indian writers, as speakers of WIS are also speakers of dialect.

A grammatical lapse which illustrates this in an accidental way is to be found in a short story Afternoon in Trinidad[22] by Alfred H. Mendes. At one point in the story, Dodo a cab-man suspects that his woman Queenie has been two-timing him and so he asks about it directly:

> One night he ask Queenie about it and she denied it so convincingly that all he could say was that he had found it strange that she was not on speaking terms with Corinne and Georgie.
> 'Why you carn' axe straight out whey you wants to know ennh?' Queenie said indignantly. 'We did have some high words and den she pull dong me clothes line. I has a good min' to bring she up oui.'

Mendes' grammatical lapse "he ask" is made glaring by the correctness of his other verbs. The explanation would seem to be as follows: a tendency in West Indian dialects is to dispense with tense markers in the verb where context or where another grammatical feature is adequate. This tendency has passed into educated use to the extent that the speaker of West Indian standard has to be on his guard (or thinks he has to be) when writing these forms. I would suggest that Mendes was tempted to say 'axe' with his character, resisted it but was so concerned about avoiding the most uneducated version that he slipped into the intermediate form 'ask'.

---

[22]In The Penguin New Writing 6 ed. John Lehmann (1941) pp. 69-82.

But the West Indian writer's inwardness with the dialects is not revealed by accident in West Indian fiction. Although they do not have another language in the sense that Nigerians or Pakistanis do, West Indian writers have enriched their work by exploiting the possibilities of the folk dialect. How they do this is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Dialect in West Indian Fiction

West Indian literature would seem to be the only substantial literature in which the dialect-speaking character is the central character. The conventional associations of dialect with comic characters or with characters on the periphery have not been eliminated, but they are disarmed of any stereotyping appearance or effect by occurring among other contextualisations of dialect. This characteristic feature of West Indian writing reflects the more obviously new event - the centrality of the Black or Coloured character and the articulation of this hitherto obscure and stereotyped person. It is important to add however that while the new contexts of dialect do not have a purely literary impulse in the way that Lawrence's use of dialect has in Lady Chatterly's Lover, neither are they to be accounted for in terms of the documentary demands of social realism. Most West Indian writers retain recognisable features of the dialects but the literary inventions are shaped to meet wider expressive needs. In the works of a few writers dialect is put in for purposes of coarse realism, or to supply an anticipated exotic demand overseas, but the more interesting West Indian writers, like artists anywhere, are constantly opening up the possibilities of language, and in some of their works we can see the dialect being expanded in this exploratory way. It is at this growing process that I wish to look, but in order to clarify the discussion I would like to work under three main headings. In the first the focus will be on the relationship between the language of narration (the language of the implied author)

and the language of the fictional character. In the second, the use of dialect to express consciousness of the character will be looked at. In the third section, there will be a more rapid look at some other significant contexts where dialect is used by West Indian writers. The illustrations will be chosen in such a way as to reveal chronoligical developments, but I do not want to imply that each new possibility opened up eliminates an earlier usage. The emphasis must be on the variety of possibilities that have been created and that can still be drawn upon.

(i) Dialect and Distance

In the extract from Tom Cringle's Log quoted earlier, one of the sources of the comic effect was an incongruity between the language of the narrator (the implied author) and that of the fictional character. The incongruity was sharper for our awareness that the Standard English of the implied author belonged to a different social world from the world of the dialect-speaking character. We must begin therefore by making the observation that in West Indian fiction the two voices no longer reflect mutually exclusive social worlds. It increases the delicacy of our reading in fact if we can imagine the narrative sections in a West Indian Standard voice. This kind of delicacy is not always necessary, however, and is hardly called for, in the dialect novels of the White Creole, H. G. de Lisser where the Negro is still a comic character and not much more, and where the author's attitude of withdrawal is reflected by a stressing of the distance between the narrator's language and that of the fictional character. An episode in Jane's Career (1914) is transitional in West Indian fiction in the way it combines an attitude of social superiority (recurrent in British presentations) with the West Indian's knowledge of the dialect. Jane is about to go to Kingston to pursue a career as a servant girl so she is taken to Daddy Buckram, the village sage. The description of the old man sets the scene in a revealing way:

> Like his audience, the Elder was black; he may have been about sixty years of age, and was intensely self-conscious. His close-cropped hair was turning grey; what chiefly distinguished him from all other men in the village was his glibness of tongue, his shoes, and his collar. Except on Sundays, every one else went bare-footed and collarless; but this Daddy Buckram would never consent to do at any time, holding that one who preached 'the Word' should be clothed in proper garments even though, as in his case, the shoes were usually down at heels and the collar dirty. (Jane's Career, p.8)

Thus persuaded into an amused superiority, we witness the recurrent device of writers handling the dialect-speaking character in a conventional way.- an impressive speech by the dialect-speaking character. The authorial markers of dissociation (my italics) are prominent, but de Lisser inscribes his dialect with obvious zest and with a dialect-speaker's understanding of dialect's capacity to absorb miscellaneous material (in this case the Bible):

> 'Jane', he continued impressively after a pause, 'Kingston is a very big an' wicked city, an' a young girl like you, who de Lord has blessed wid a good figure an' a face, must be careful not to keep bad company. Satan goeth about like a roaring lion in Kingston seeking who he may devour. He will devour you if you do not take him to the Lord in prayer. Do you' work well. Write to you' moder often, for a chile who don't remember her parent cannot prosper. Don't stay out in de street in de night, go to church whenever you' employer allow you. If sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Now, tell me what I say to you.'
>
> Jane hesitated a while, then answered,
>
> 'You say I mus' behave meself, sah, an' go to church, an' don't keep bad company, an dat de devil is a roarin' lion. An' ... An' dat I must write mumma.
>
> The Elder smiled his approval. 'I see', he observed benignantly, 'that you have been giving my words attention. If you always remember dem like dat, you will conquer in de battle.' (Jane's Career, p.9)

As a speaker of WIS, de Lisser was capable of more varied uses of the dialect than he settled for. But his repeatedly comic purposes merely followed the convention of European writers. In his novels, for all his inwardness with the dialect, the two voices come from two different worlds.

Daddy Buckram is a peripheral character, so it would be unjust to make too much of the comparison between de Lisser's presentation and Samuel Selvon's handling of a speech-making occasion by his peasant hero Tiger in A Brighter Sun

(1952). But what I want to show is that social attitude has a great deal to do with the effects being pursued. Selvon is too involved with his character as an individual person to be distracted into superficial comedy. As a result, we find that the dialect is modified in the direction of the Standard, and the authorial voice slips in and out of the speech without drawing attention to its greater 'correctness'. The episode occurs when Tiger's parents come to visit him on the birth of Tiger and Urmilla's first child. There is a small party and Joe, the neighbour has proposed a toast:

> Tiger saw a chance to prove he was getting to be a man. He said: 'I is the man of the house, and I have to answer Joe toast.'
> Urmilla moved with a sixth sense and filled the glasse again. Tiger looked at her and smiled and she knew she had done the right thing.
> But when he began to talk he found it wasn't going to be as easy as he thought, even with the rum in his head. 'Well'. he began waveringly, '(-we- glad to have family and friends here today, especially as the baby born. Is true we not rich and we have only a small thing here but still is a good thing. So let we make a little merry for the baby. I should really begin different, I don't knew what happen to me. I should say: "Ladies and gentlemens" and then make speech. But I cannot speechify very good. I would learn though ---' That was as far as he could go. He felt he would talk foolishness if he continued, and he gulped his drink.
> He wanted everyone to make a speech, but all the elders shook their heads. And it became awkward just standing and looking at one another, as if something had gone wrong. (A Brighter Sun, p.52)

Writers since de Lisser have taken a less restricted view of the dialect-speaking character, and consequently of the dialect itself. The closer involvement of the implied author with the low-life character is reflected by a closing of the gap between the language of narration and the language of the fictional character. Further examples of this may be found in the next section called 'Dialect and Consciousness'. I want to continue this section with a discussion of some attempts to draw the two voices together by techniques of narration.

The use of a dialect-speaking narrator by V. S. Reid in the novel New Day (1949) and by John Hearne in a short story At the Stelling (1960) remind us that few West Indian authors reproduce dialect precisely in their works. In these two cases invention is more obvious than in most. Both writers invent successfully,

however, because they are intimate with the dialects out of which they are constructing, and have a keen eye for recognisable qualities and literary possibilities: as a result we feel that the language in the works is not a realistic reproduction of dialect as it may be spoken anywhere in fact, but it is a legitimate extension of the familiar.

Reid's novel which links the granting of a new constitution to Jamaica in 1944 with the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 is narrated by the old man John Campbell who is a witness of the new and was an actor in the old. The novel opens in the later period and the new day unleashes the memory of the aged man. The whole is then unfolded more or less continuously from the earlier time to the later, but with regular returns to the present as the old man makes an interjection here or emphasises a point there. Because the story is told as an oral performance by the reminiscing man Reid is able to make a credible show of narrating in dialect. But what he actually does is to push WIS and dialect even closer together in the narrating voice of John Campbell:

> Mas'r, is a heavy night, this. Memory is pricking at me mind, and restlessness is a-ride me soul. I scent many things in the night-wind, night-wind is a-talk of days what pass and gone.
> But the night-wind blows down from the mountains, touching only the high places as it comes; so then, 'member, I can remember only these places which stand high on the road we ha' traveled. (New Day, p.85)

Our sense of the speaking voice, rhythmic repetition, and personification imagery make this an impressive passage, but it is not dialect in the same way that the following from de Lisser is dialect:

> Who you gwine to send for policeman for? demanded Sarah, also at the top of her voice and with arms akimbo. 'Me! Y'u must be drunk! Look at the mailata (mulatto) coman how she stand! Y'u t'ink I am a schoolgal, no? Y'u t'ink you can teck exvantage of me! If it wasn't for one t'ing, I would hold you in here an' gie y'u such a beaten dat you wouldn't walk for a week. (Jane's Career, p.118)

The stylised dialect in Reid's novel never sinks to such exotic vulgarity, although it does show signs of over-writing as in the pretentious homeliness of the following passage:

> An old man now, me. Many years bank the flame that was John Campbell. And down the passages o' those years many doors have opened. Some o' them ha' let in rich barbecues o' joyousness, with good things covering the bottom of the pot o' life and no thorns there to give me pain. And others have opened into butteries of hell, and me soul has been scarred with the fires. (New Day, p.42)

On the whole, however, Reid's experiment is a successful one. Because the language of narration is pushed so close to the language of the characters, the reader is seldom jerked into awareness of two separate voices.

At less risk, since it is a much shorter piece, Hearne achieves vivid effects with his dialect-speaking narrator in At the Stelling:

> I sink far down in that river and already, before it happen, I can feel perai chew at my fly button and tear off my cod, or alligator grab my leg to drag me to drowning. But God is good. When I come up the sun is still there and I strike out for the little island in the river opposite the stelling. The river is full of death that pass you by, but the stelling holds a walking death like the destruction of the Apocalypse.
>
> I make ground at the island and draw myself into the mud and the bush and blood draw after me from between my legs. And when I look back at the stelling, I see Mister Cockburn lie down in him deck chair, as if fast asleep, and Mister Bailey lying on him faceupon the boards...
>
> And John standing on the path, with the repeater still as the finger of God in him hands... (West Indian Stories (1960), p.62)

The first point to be made is that it would be impossible to feel the full effect of this passage unless we imagine a speaking West Indian voice. Repetition, monosyllabic rhythm and personification imagery make this passage resemble some in Reid's novel, but it is much less obviously a dialect passage than any in Reid. Little more than the pervasive present tense prevents it from being West Indian Standard.

Although both Reid and Hearne thus come close to making a modified form of dialect do the work both of narration and dialogue, their use of narrating characters are conservative devices. It is in Samuel Selvon's works that the language of the implied author boldly declares itself as dialect differing little from the language of the characters. In the story 'Brackley and the Bed',[23] the

---

[23] In the collection Ways of Sunlight (1957)

author takes up the stance of the calypsonian or ballad-maker and both SE and WIS are abolished:

> Brackley hail from Tobago, which part they have it to say Robinson Crusoe used to hang out with Man Friday. Things was brown in that island and he make for England and manage to get a work and was just settling down when bam! he get a letter from his aunt saying Teena want to come to England too.
>
> Well, right away he write aunty and say no, no, because he have a feeling this girl would make botheration if she come England. The aunt write back to say she didn't mean to say that Teena want to come England, but that Teena left Tobago for England already.
>
> Brackley hold his head and bawl. And the evening the boat train come in at Waterloo, he went there and start 'busing she right away not waiting to ask how the folks was at home or anything.
>
> 'What you doing in London?' Brackley ask as soon as Teena step off the train. 'What you come here for, eh? Even though I write home to say things real hard?'
>
> 'What happen, you buy the country already?' Teena sheself giving tit for tat right away. 'You ruling England now? The Queen abdicate?'
>
> (Ways of Sunlight, p.151)

This is as far as any West Indian author has gone towards closing the gap between the language of narration and the language of the fictional character. I have argued that social attitude has something to do with the closing of the gap. But this would be a misleading emphasis to end with. Writers like V. S. Naipaul achieve effects of incongruity by stressing differences between the two voices, and much of the fun of Alvin Burnett's God the Stonebreaker comes about in this way. A purely literary point on which to end therefore, is that West Indian writers who possess WIS and dialect have a wide range within which to vary the distance between the voice of narration and the voice of the character. As we have seen this can be of great use in the hands of the artist who wishes to take advantage of it.

(ii) Dialect and Consciousness

In Corentyne Thunder (1941), Edgar Mittelholzer's first novel one of the centres of interest is Ramgolall a cowminder on the brooding savannah of the Corentyne coast:

> A tale we are about to tell of Ramgolall, the cowminder, who lived on the Corentyne coast of British Guiana the only British colony on the mainland of

South America. Ramgolall was small in body and rather short and very thin. He was an East Indian who had arrived in British Guiana in 1898 as an immigrant indentured to a sugar estate. He had worked very hard. He had faithfully served out the period of his indenture, and now at sixty-three years of age he minded cows on the savannah of the Corentyne coast, his own lord and guide. (Corentyne Thunder, p.7)

It is an unpromising start, with the West Indian author doing his best to accommodate his prospective British reader by providing the geographical and historical background. The tone of the nuncio combines with the stance of the superior omniscient novelist. But the work recovers from this disastrous beginning as Mittelholzer moves into his tale of fragile human endeavour in a vast inscrutable landscape.

Mittelholzer handles his dialect-speaking peasants with great compassion but his use of dialect is in accordance with a strict realistic criterion of appropriateness to the character. This means that if he wishes to express anything complicated about the character he has to work, not directly through the character's consciousness, or in the character's language, but by a mediating omniscience.

I would like therefore to look at an episode in Corentyne Thunder where an attempt is made to express Ramgolall's overwhelming sense of desolation. This will be followed by two examples from later West Indian novels where dialect is used and the character's consciousness articulated in similarly complicated situations. I do not wish to imply that one method is necessarily better than the other. My purpose is to show by comparison how dialect offers alternative artistic possibilities to the West Indian writer.

Ramgolall and his daughter are returning home from work when the girl Beena is seized by pain:

Beena moaned softly and her breathing came in heavy gusts as though her soul were fatigued with the things of this life and wished to leave her body in gasp after gasp of wind. And Ramgolall, weak in body and in mind, could only look about him at a loss. His dark eyes seemed to appeal to the savannah and then to the sky. But the savannah remained still and grey-green, quiet and immobile in its philosophy. And the sky, too, would do nothing to aid him. Pale purple in the failing light and streaked with feathery brown and yellow clouds, the sky watched like a statue of Buddha.

'Ow! Bettay, you no go dead. Eh? Bettay? Talk na? Is wha' wrong Bettay?'

But Beena moaned in reply, doubled up.

'Talk, no Bettay? Try. You' belly a-hurt?'

The moan came again, like a portent, like the echo of a horn sounded in the depth of the earth. "The Dark gathers", it seemed to tell the soul of Ramgolall "and Death cometh with the Dark. Be resigned my son."

Ramgolall stood up in a panic, looking all around him. He saw the cows, a group of moving spots, headed for their pen and getting smaller as they went. He could smell their dung mingled with the iodine in the air. He could see the tiny mud-house, with its dry palm-leaf roof, where he and Beena and Kattree lived. It stood far off a mere speck.

(Corentyne Thunder, p.10)

I have italicised some phrases which seem to be too crudely intrusive, and which get in the way of the reader's imagination. But Mittelholzer works in other more acceptable ways. The evocation of empty savannah and vast sky against Ramolall's appealing eyes are brought home in the final paragraph. Here distant objects express his desolation and panic at being cut off; and the faint smell in the air seems to suggest his wobbly hold upon existence.

But however effective is Mittelholzer's indirect method, it remains an indirect method at its best. Ramgolall is little more than a figure of pathos. Further, we become aware of the meaning of his panic but Ramgolall himself remains without consciousness. In this light, Ramgolall's words and dialect are flat counters out of touch with the experience he has undergone. And all the effects of the passage are achieved through devices in Standard English or West Indian Standard.

Because of Mittelholzer's limited view of Ramgolall's possibilities, Corentyne Thunder never really becomes the tale of a cowminder that it sets out to be. Ramgolall becomes increasingly peripheral as the novel advances. The peasant character is emphatically a central character in Samuel Selvon's A Brighter Sun (1952). And it is in this novel that dialect first becomes the language of consciousness in West Indian fiction. For Tiger is an introspective character and a dialect-speaking one. As we follow his development from pre-mature Hindu wedding

to turbulent fatherhood and responsible domestic anxiety, from Indian legacy to Trinidadian citizenship, and from obscure youth to naive enquiring manhood, dialect becomes saturated with inner experience. Selvon does not present Tiger's consciousness exclusively through dialect; but authorial comment, reportage of the character's thought processes and reproduction of these processes directly in dialect modulate into one another so smoothly that the impression given is of direct access to the dialect-speaker's raw consciousness:

> Life was beginning to get complicated, now that he was beginning to learn things. Sookdeo had promised to teach him to read. Boysie was going to show him many things in Port of Spain. Where was his life going to fit in? Perhaps, if he liked the city, he could get a job there, and give up the garden. Or Urmilla could keep it while he was at work. Anyway he wasn't sure. He wasn't sure about anything... When Urmilla and the baby were asleep, he looked up at the roof and felt revulsion for his wife and child. They were to blame for all his worry. If he were alone, he could be like Boysie, not caring a damn. He would go to the city and get a job... He would even go to school in the night and learn to read and write... Look at Sookdeo, he argued, you think I want to be like he when I get old? Is only old age that I respect in him. All he could do is read and drink rum. When I learn to read, you think is only Guardian I going to read? I going to read plenty books, about America and England and all them places. Man I will go and live in Port of Spain, this village too small, you can't learn anything except how to plant crop.
>
> (A Brighter Sun, pp. 90-91)

If Tiger's thought processes are naive, they are at least spread over a wide area of experience. In following them, Selvon makes dialect a flexible instrument.

In Wilson Harris' The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) which also takes East Indians in the West Indies for its raw material, dialect becomes the dramatic language for articulating a complex process in consciousness. Mohammed and his brothers Hassan and Kaiser had deprived their crazy half-brother of his legacy and murdered him. After an initial period of prosperity the three brothers begin to feel their possessions crumbling and they become the prey of the ruthless money-lender Ram. The strange materialisation of a wandering labourer called Oudin presents Ram with a longed-for accomplice and a willing slave. Ram sends Oudin to Mohammed, ostensibly as a useful helper but in fact Oudin's mission is to steal

Mohammed's cattle thus driving Mohammed even further into economic dependence upon the demonic money-lender. Oudin's resemblance to the murdered half-brother causes consternation in the Mohammed household and from this point Mohammed begins to feel himself visited by a curse:

> 'Is like if some kind of thing circulating me.' He paused.
> 'What you mean?' Ram was involved and interested.
> 'I don't know exactly how to explain. But time itself change since he come. Is like if I starting to grow conscious after a long time, that time itself is a forerunner to something. But Ah learning me lesson so late, is like it is a curse, and things that could have gone smooth now cracking up in haste around me. I so bewilder I can't place nothing no more. What I used to value and what I used not to value overlapping. Two, three, four face looking at me. Every face so different. I don't know which is private, which is public, which is past, which is future. And yet all is one, understand me?'
> 'I do,' Ram said softly, and almost inaudibly.
> 'I suppose I is an ignorant man. Ah lose me grip long ago. I wish to God AH could accept the fact that I changing. Ah feel that I, me then, is just a piece of moving furniture and something else, bigger by far, pushing me about until I don't know whether I standing 'pon me head, me backside, or me foot.' (The Far Journey of Oudin, pp. 91-92)

The process of break-up of the known substances in the character's life under the weight of an intuition of something beyond complacent existence is a crucial stage in the experience of a Harris character. By boldly allowing the crumbling character to describe his condition in dialect, Harris enlists the urgency of the rhythmic speaking voice in suggesting the urgency of the experience. Here too, as throughout Harris' first five novels, the recognisable elements in the character's language offer the reader a foothold for coming to closer grips with a disturbing and unfamiliar state of consciousness. The successful use of dialect in a context like this carries the conventionally simple language of the simple character to new levels of profundity in West Indian fiction.

(iii) Some More Contexts of Dialect

In the last two sections, I have been trying to show that dialect is a natural part of the equipment of the West Indian novelist, used as a means of narration, and for expressing the consciousness of the peasant character in

various human states. It has been suggested that such a subtle and flexible use of dialect on such a large scale is probably unique in literature. In this section, I want to consolidate the argument by providing some more examples of the varying contexts of dialect. It has possibly begun to appear already that the degree of Englishness of the dialect varies from situation to situation in the novels, and this impression will be confirmed by the passages to follow. But certain common features which have also emerged from previous examples will again be in evidence. These are: improvisation in syntax and lexis; direct and pithy expression; a strong tendency towards the use of image especially of the personification type; and various kinds of repetition of syntactic structure and lexis combining with the spoken voice to produce highly rhythmic effects. It would be repetitive to accompany each extract below with a full description, and since my main purpose is simply to provide examples of the use of dialect in various contexts, I shall restrict analytic remarks to a necessary minimum.

Two examples of dialect used in a broadly political situation may be taken from works by George Lamming. Lamming's second novel The Emigrants (1954) brings together, on a ship bound for England, a collection of West Indians from different islands and of different social and educational levels. This gives Lamming scope to exercise a wide range of linguistic skills in differentiating the various dialects of his characters. For they all find themselves drawn into frequent council in which they discover the sameness of the islands and the sameness of their human quest for something better - national identity or personal freedom. The many discussions in the work are carried on in dialect. The example I want to quote is from a long speech by a Jamaican who begins with the generalisation that "West Indies people whatever islan' you bring them from, them want to prove something." An account of the settling of the islands from different sources, and the state of disorientation this has produced, leads to this universal understanding:

... Them is West Indians. Not Jamaicans or Trinidadians. Cause the bigger the better. An' is the reason the West Indies may out o' dat vomit produce a great people 'cause them provin' that them want to be something. Some people say them have no hope for people who doan' know exactly w'at them want or who them is, but that is a lot of rass-clot talk. The interpretation me give hist'ry is people the world over always searchin' an' feelin', from time immemorial, them keep searchin' an' feelin'. Them ain't know what is wrong 'cause them ain't know w'at is right, but them keep searchin' an' feelin', an' when them dead an' gone, hist'ry write things 'bout them that them themself would not have know or understand. Them wouldn't know themself if them see themself in hist'ry. 'Cause what them was tryin' to prove them leave to hist'ry to give a name. (The Emigrants, p.68)

Lamming's 'Jamaican dialect' is not only credible as that, it is made to carry an extremely sophisticated notion - the kernel of the novel - without signs of strain or unnaturalness, and without announcing itself as dialect.

In the same author's Season of Adventure (1960) a novel concerned with different levels of freedom and the ways in which the political is also deeply personal, the following conversation takes place between Crim, who is grateful that the colonial powers have given freedom at last to San Cristobal, and Powell, who sees the matter in a ruthlessly different light:

'I say it was a real freedom happen when the tourist army went away', Crim said. 'It look a real freedom they give San Cristobal'.
'It don't have that kind o' givin'' said Powell, trying to restrain his anger. 'Is wrong to say that, 'cause free is free an' it don't have no givin'. Free is how you is from the start, an' when it look different you got to move, just move, an' when you movin' say that is a natural freedom make you move. You can't move to freedom, Crim, 'cause freedom is what you is an' where you start an' where you always got to stand. (Season of Adventure, p.18)

It is worth pointing out not only that thd dialect is convincing and that it is being made to work in the context of a political philosophy, but also that the emphatic and categorical quality of the language being used by Powell is appropriate to his character. Powell is in fact a passionate fanatic, a man who will not be handed his freedom by anyone and who has a violent distrustful attitude to the liberal gesture. Towards the end of the novel, when the white-skinned West Indian girl, Fola, wishes to free herself from the traditional

denial by her class of its West Indianness, it is Powell the uncompromising fanatical victim of the history of his time who makes a murderous assault upon her:

> 'No noise', he said, rubbing his hand inside his shirt, 'no more than a sandfly can make, I warn you, no noise.'
> 'But ... but ... but what have I done?' Fola stammered.
> 'Enough,' said Powell, 'you an' your lot done enough.'
> 'Why? Why?' Fola's voice dribbled.
> 'It too late,' said Powell, rubbing the hand inside his shirt, 'it too late to explain, just as it too late for you an' your lot to make your peace with me.'
> .....
> 'You don't understand', she cried. 'You don't understand.'
> 'Exact, exact,' said Powell, 'I don't understand. An' what's more I don't want to. Where you an' your lot concern, I hope I never live to understand.'
> Now Powell's hand emerged slowly from inside his shirt; but his fist was still hidden as it rubbed against his chest.
> 'What I do I do alone,' said Powell, 'no help from you an' your lot, 'cause I learn, I learn how any playing 'bout with our lot bound to end. You know the rules too good, an' it too late, it too late for me to learn what rules you have for murderin' me. So is me go murder first. Otherwise is you what will murder me, or make me murder myself.
> (Season of Adventure, p.328)

The extraordinary power of the emotion in this incident might prevent us from realising that Powell is a dialect-speaker whose way of speaking is precisely appropriate to his highly personal condition.

The advance which Lamming's artistic use of dialect represents may be illustrated by a quotation from an early West Indian writer who invested in the common language. In Alfred Mendes' Black Fauns (1935) set in a barrackyard in Trinidad, the women of the yard meet daily and have long conversations in dialect on miscellaneous subjects. An admiring remark about White people, and a denigration of Africans by one of the fauns prompts the following rejoinder from Ethelrida:

> 'I don't know why you say that, old lady' Ethelrida retorted. 'I see all the white people in civilised lands behaving worse than savage an' heathen. Look at de war in nineteen-fourteen. You ever see people made in God's image cut up and shoot up an' mash up each other like dat? I see Mister Pompom does like to go to the teeayter. What for? To see white girl upon white

> sheet behave like dressed-up worthless woman. I hear white priest an' white parson does go to Africa in the forest to teach our own colour about Christ an' God. Dey does call demself missionary. It look to me they got more than enough people in their own land to teach about Christ an' God. It look to me like niggers in Africa happy when white people leave them alone. As soon as white people, with Bible an' chaplet in hand go to our own people in Africa like they does bring trouble and unhappiness an' misery.'
>
> (Black Fauns, p.194)

Although Mendes' usage is not as dynamic as Lamming's, the passage, a product of the nineteen-thirties, was a sign of things to come.

In Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) a sonorous dialect is used simultaneously for comic effect and to register social protest. In one episode, Nathan feels that he is qualified to describe the limiting society to his woman Ruby: "I have come to a damn serious understanding during my travels in and around this blasted past-tense village. A man could live in this backward place, Barbados, and still could walk about the place as he like and pleases." The conversation occurs when Nathan and Ruby are considering sending their son to the High School. Nathan argues that there is no hope of any but the least considered white-collar jobs for the educated Black man:

> ... He could even come out a saniterry inspector and walk all through this blasted village in a khaki suit and white cork hat with a white enamel ladle in his hand' to dip down inside the poor people shitty closets with. But be-Christ! after all them school fees I pay out, and all them dollars spend on books, I hopes, I hopes to-hell that Milton do not come out as no damn inspector, looking for a million and one larvees in no blasted person' outdoor closet, or to see if they have young mosquitoes in their drinking-water buckets. That Ruby.... that Ruby is the lengths and advantages Milton could go in this kis-me-arse island after he find himself in the possession of a high-school eddication. (Amongst Thistles and Thorns, p.105)

The zest with which Nathan puts this case and the rhythmic insistence of his language might be thought to distract from the force of the protest. But this would be true only if direct protest were Clarke's intention. In fact, Nathan is an utterly irresponsible character and his intention is to regain the favour of Ruby by attacking the things that threaten to thwart the boy. There is a

protest element in his speech which is part of an authorial intention, but it is emphatically in the background.

The full measure of Nathan's deceptive oratory comes out when having argued against the futility of becoming educated, he insists that Milton must be sent to school. Aware of Ruby's vulnerability on this question and of her yearnings for a better life for the boy, Nathan sweeps her along with the rhetoric of dialect:

> 'And if Milton is a boy what have a singing voice in his head, I want him to sing in the cathedral choirs 'pon a Sundee. Oh Christ, I could see that bastard now, Rube, darling love! I could see Milton right this very now before me eye' wearing them red robes and that thing 'round his neck...
>
> Yeah ... and walking up and down that cathedral aisle with the choirs, and the Bishop o' the islan', and singing them psalms and carols and songs ancient and modern so damn sweet, more sweeter than if he was a blasted humming bird!'
>
> 'That is our son, Nathan.'
>
> 'Be-Christ, Ruby, you have just say a mouthful! Milton is our son. Our own-own flesh-and-blood possession!' (Amongst Thistles and Thorns, p.105)

What I am trying to suggest with the quotations from Clarke, is that dialect has travelled so far in West Indian fiction that it is used to produce different effects simultaneously and that it can even go beyond lyricism to fake lyricism.

A fine example of the lyricism of dialect occurs in Jan Carew's Black Midas (1958). The novel as a whole is remarkable for the way it uses the vivid immediate qualities of dialect to suggest the speech of outdoor men, and to invoke a staggering landscape, but I shall confine myself to a lush moment when Rhodius and Shark (the Black Midas) are travelling up-river and Rhodius sees Shark sitting quietly:

> 'You hear the voices?' he asked.
>
> 'Which voices?'
>
> 'The river, man, the river. This water got more talk than the tongue in Babel. When night-time come all the dead man under the river does talk.' He spoke quietly, with his eyes on John Pye's shadow in the bow all the time. 'They got good people and bad one under the river, and me travel up and down so often me know them all. Me travel when star was bright, when moon hang low, when dark so heavy me couldn't spit through it. The good people does say "Rhodius, Rhodius, don't take no chance with the power-god; Kusewayo sitting stony-still in he big chair. Steer clear of the living rock; they got tentacle-hand to pull you down ... don't take no risk by Topoco, the green spirit of the quiet water got whirlpool to suck you in ... don't make mistake at the Looking Glass, is time of the year for sacrifice, that

water deep with hungrying for you.' But the bad ones does say 'Come down, Rhodius. Come down, Rhodius. We will make you bones flute like weeping wood! Come down Rhodius; the river bottom smooth and we will roll you eye from here to Macharee." You hear them?' he said. 'You hear them?' And I pressed my ear against the gunwale, but all I heard was tongueless lisping and all I saw when I sat up was starlight dancing on the rim of whirlpools. (Black Midas, pp. 177-178)

In passages like this, Carew is able to suggest the haunting qualities of his massive landscape, thus making credible the central faith of the novel, upon which much of its tension is built, that the pork-knocker characters are literally possessed, that the jungle is in their veins. In the final sentence we have an instance, I think, of WIS more than usually suffused with dialect rhythm and expressiveness.

The final example comes from Wilson Harris' Palace of the Peacock (1960). In his five Guyana novels, Harris follows a vision which demands to be worked out in unconventional ways: his characters do not exist in a recognisable social context; he is not concerned with the portrayal in realistic terms of the individual character; and there is a collapsing of our usual constitutive categories of Time, Person and Place. We find in his novels, therefore, that the living and the dead, and people from different times and places coexist. Further, persons are constantly collapsing into one another and they frequently collapse into place and thing. Harris' vision is a vision of universal transcendence and it challenges our basic conceptions about the nature of reality.

This means, taking the word in its common sense, that there is an air of unreality in these Guyana novels. There are two main ways in which Harris gives initial credibility to his strange fictions. The first is by the sensuous rendering of an intimate, felt Guyanese landscape. The second is by the use of dialect. This is true in general in the novels, but it is more sharply apparent at critical moments. At a time when characters are undergoing the most bizarre or extraordinary experiences, they express themselves in dialect.

In Palace of the Peacock, the crew of dead men pursuing their journey up-river beyond Mariella become aware of a flock of birds wheeling overhead. Each of the men has been dead once before, and they are all approaching their second death. Since Da Silva is the first to go, he "sees" the most, and between him and Cameron who is still "alive" (only once dead) there is a tense exchange:

> 'What in heaven name really preying on you sight and mind, Boy?' Cameron suddenly became curious. 'I only seeing vulture bird. Where the parrot what eating you?'
>
> 'Ah telling you Ah dream the boat sink with all of we', da Silva said speaking to himself as if he had forgotten Cameron's presence. 'Ah drowned dead and Ah float. All of we expose and float ...'
>
> 'Is vulture bird you really feeling and seeing' shouted Cameron. His voice was a croak in the air. Da Silva continued - a man grown deaf and blind with sleep - 'Ah dream Ah get another chance to live me life over from the very start, you hear? He paused and the thought sank back into the stream. 'The impossible start to happen. Ah lose me own image and time like if I forget is where me sex really start ...'
>
> 'Fool, stop it,' Cameron hissed.
>
> 'Don't pick at me,' da Silva said. 'The impossible start happen I tell you. Water start dream, rock and stone start dream, tree trunk and tree root dreaming, bird and beast dreaming...'
>
> 'You is a menagerie and a jungle of a fool', Cameron's black tongue laughed and twisted. (Palace of the Peacock, pp. 110-111)

Harris modulates the language in this passage so subtly that we might miss the way that we are made to follow through from Cameron's invective to da Silva's exultation to the discreet organising touches of the implied author. Strange as the experience may be and no matter how undifferentiated the two men in a conventional way, the tension between them is laid bare, and da Silva's sense of a new beginning makes a vivid impression. Harris' use of the dialect in his novels is quite crucial from the point of view of their readability. Because the "folk language" is involved in such a complex imaginative world, the range and flexibility of the dialect are made greater.

To understand properly the certainty with which West Indian writers have turned the dialects to such literary account as I have tried to illustrate, we must remember that coexisting with the new literary growth in the West Indies, and

pre-dating it is a long oral tradition of story-telling and folk poetry in the dialect. A modern representative of this tradition is Louise Bennett of Jamaica whose dialect poems produced over the last twenty-five years have recently been published as Jamaica Labrish: Jamaica Dialect Poems (1967). In Trinidad, the oral tradition flourishes in the calypso whose most skilful exponent is Francisco Slinger, called 'The Mighty Sparrow'. It would be too difficult to demonstrate here that this oral tradition has affected the Standard English of the West Indies, but it can easily be seen that in its wide-ranging use of dialect, West Indian fiction has at least begun to assimilate the oral tradition. It is to be lamented that while local audiences have made Sparrow a millionaire and a populer hero because of his use of dialect, those who read "object to its use in books which are read abroad. 'They must be does talk so byyou', one woman said to me. 'Thy don't talk so by me'."[24]

---

[24] V. S. Naipaul The Middle Passage (1962) p.69

CHAPTER V

Society

Two recent publications stand for the last general approach from which I would like to develop an argument. In 1961 there was published in America a volume of essays by separate hands - The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth;[1] this was followed in Britain four years later by Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture[2] - papers from a Conference sponsored jointly by the publishers William Heinemann Ltd. and the University of Leeds. Neither of these books is as committed to the theory of a Commonwealth culture as their subtitles may seem to imply. The first is a useful country by country account; the Leeds-Heinemann venture is made up of a number of individual essays grouped around selected topics.

But there are some assumptions in the Commonwealth label which need to be examined as we can see in the following words from an introductory speech at the Leeds Conference:

> Local critics know the local literature and the local situation; their comments on both would be richer if they could see them both in comparison with other similar situations in other countries and see, too, the treatment given to them by writers in those different countries.[3]

Professor Jeffares' "other countries" is restricted to Commonwealth countries. But if comparisons are to be made there is no literary reason why they should be confined to books from within the colonies and ex-colonies. If we are interested in how imaginative literature works, a comparison between Defoe's Moll Flanders (1722) and Cyprian Ekwensi's Jagua Nana (1961) is just as likely to be illuminating as one between the Nigerian's novel and God the Stonebreaker (1962) by the West Indian Alvin Bennett. And V. S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) does

---

[1] Cornell University Press, New York. Edited by A. L. McLeod.
[2] Published in 1965. Edited by John Press.
[3] A. N. Jeffares in Commonwealth Literature, p.XIV.

not suffer badly by a comparison with King Lear. Analagous human situations and analagous states of society occur at widely different times and between people who do not necessarily fall under the same social or political order.

A comparative approach based on the notion of Commonwealth would imply a restriction on the universalising power of literature and would inhibit the comparing critic. If we were to give this up and take the Commonwealth viewpoint as an attempt rather to suggest the shaping influence on literature of background realities we would still be obliged to find it unsatisfactory. For the synthetic principle ignores too many social, cultural and political differences between the countries it seeks to hold together:

> The speakers from the older Dominions have told us much that we might not have known, and have allowed us to make some comparative deductions, but the observations they had to offer could hardly have the novelty of those made by the delegates from the younger Dominions... The older Dominions - Canada, Australia, New Zealand are clearly tied to the British tradition and share the same problems together.[4]

The euphemisms "older Dominions" and "younger Dominions" point to the first major division to be made - into Black Commonwealth and White Commonwealth. To elaborate in a crude way, colonials in the White Commonwealth were never a subject people in the sense of being held in check by an alien oppressor on the land itself. However outcast some of the transportees may have been, and however alienated the voluntary exiles, these colonists were not psychologically or physically cut off from their original country nor were they violently deprived of a cultural tradition. But in the Black Commonwealth, colonisation has meant the imposition by one people of its institutions and values upon another, as well as the denigration of the subject people as race, nation and as individuals. (See Chapter III: Race). The process of decolonisation is therefore more dramatic in the Black Commonwealth:

> Decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men ... a whole social structure being changed from

---

[4]Douglas Grant in Commonwealth Literature p.207.

> the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonised...
>
> Decolonisation never takes place un-noticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them.... Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men... the thing which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.[5]

Fanon's vivid writing does not describe what actually happens in the areas where European master and colonised Black confront each other. But it seems to suggest a sense of dissolution and regeneration in these areas which cannot be said to be as striking or as widespread in the settled atmosphere of the "older Dominions".

Once a broad distinction is made however, we have to give up the notion of a Black Commonwealth too. There is little sense of tradition or social convention in the West Indies for example, no equivalent to the tribal world and traditional life which the Nigerian Chinua Achebe draws upon in Things Fall Apart (1958). As we shall see later, commentators on West Indian literature are only too aware of this particular distinction.

But it is at this point that it is necessary to bring forward the main objections to the idea of the Commonwealth as a way of approaching literature. In the first place, it forces us to concentrate on political and social issues to a degree that invests these with a disproportionate influence upon our attempts to offer critical opinion on what are, above all, works of imaginative literature. In the second, it consolidates a tendency to oversimplify the relationship between literature ("local literature") and the society ("the local situation") from which it takes its stimulus. These misdirections are particularly harmful in the West Indies where the death-marks of slavery are still to be seen in the economic condition of the masses, and in race and colour tensions only on a more subtle scale than in pre-Emancipation society. So many West Indian writers make these

---

[5]Frantz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth (1965) pp.29 and 30.

the inspiration and the substance of their fictions that in the first critical book on Caribbean writing in general we read:

> Even the most cursory glance at the literature (and the painting, sculpture, music and dancing) of the Caribbean, in Spanish, French or English, reveals a constant concern for what I have called race and colour. The Negro in Caribbean Literature might, at first sight, have seemed a more appropriate title for this study... However... /such a title/ suggests a simplification ... Race and Colour on the other hand embraces a diversity of social, cultural, and historical relations between the man of colour (Negro or mulatto), who thinks of himself and writes consciously as a coloured man, and the white world.[6]

In an earlier chapter, I examined one aspect of this boring socio-literary phenomenon in detail and in a head-on way. Here, avoiding the more obvious race, colour and social protest themes, I propose to work by indirection. I shall use three broad headings that do not seem to be related to one another - "Society and Literature", "Novels of Childhood" and "Terrified Consciousness" - and I shall come to concentrate on some works whose primary appeal is to the imagination, not to social and political conscience. But the critical issues raised at the beginning of this paragraph will never be out of range.

Society and Literature

This section is divided into three parts each of which attempts to throw light on a separate aspect of the relationship between society and literature. An essay on the novels of Roger Mais is followed by an account of concubinage in West Indian fiction. Finally, I shall make some remarks on V. S. Naipaul's chronicle, A House for Mr. Biswas (1962).

Black Lightning: the achievement of Roger Mais

Shortly after the publication of his first novel The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953) Mais declared in an interview that his intention had been "to give the world a true picture of the real Jamaica and the dreadful condition of the working classes".[7] We find in the work, accordingly, a stark and realistic

---

[6] G. R. Coulthard Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature, (1962) p.5.
[7] John O' London's Weekly, (May 1, 1953).

picture of impoverished people trapped in a squalid slum that is identifiably Jamaican. The work has been received in the spirit in which it was passionately submitted and Mais' second novel Brother Man consolidated the author's reputation as a novelist of social protest. The reputation has persisted in spite of his third novel Black Lightning (1955) in which there are no signs of organised society and not the slightest expression of a protesting attitude. The work has been virtually disregarded in the West Indies but I would like to contend that it is in Black Lightning that Mais' art and understanding are in greatest harmony and that it is upon this his last published novel that his reputation must rest.

I do not wish to imply that Black Lightning must be kept separate from the other novels, nor would it be proper to take the view that it is not at all connected to the Jamaican social situation. There is in fact a progressive movement from novel to novel of a kind that can only be described as exploratory. I would like to trace this movement as a way of showing how Black Lightning develops out of and transcends the local social situation.

The first novel The Hills Were Joyful Together is set in a yard which is a microcosm of Jamaican slum life. The characters are differentiated from one another but the author is more interested in projecting the life of the yard as a whole than in creating individual characters. Supplementing what we make of the expressed life of the yard are authorial intrusions of two kinds, advancing two main "philosophies". The first has to do with Mais' social protest intention, and may be described as materialistic determinism. It is usually put in the mouth of the prison chaplain: "... What happens to people when their lives are constricted and dwarfed and girdled with poverty... things like that and that and that come out of it... moral deformity, degradation, disease..." (p.197). The second philosophy declared in the novel occurs in authorial choruses at the beginnings of chapters. It is a philosophy of Chance or the indifference of the Universe: "The trifling

sprigs of chance confound our footsteps ... the events that make tomorrow quit themselves today outside our ken..." (p.242) and "The dark shadows beyond our ken crowd in upon us and stand and wait unseen...they wait in silence and drink us up in darkness..." (p.150). As Mais declares them, these philosophies clash with each other. But what is worse, they remain on the level of abstraction as insufficient glosses on the expressed life in the yard. At one point in the novel, Mais throws them together and seeks to show them in action. This is to be found at the end of the book when Surjue is shot and prevented from making good his escape from prison. It is a cloudy and dark night, but just as Surjue is on the top of the wall, the wind parts, the clouds and the moon shines through. At the same time, Warder Nickoll with whom Surjue had had a fight, lifts his head on account of pain from a toothache, sees Surjue and gets him with one shot. As Surjue hits the ground the clouds return to cover the moon and it is dark again. Mais' over-deliberate manipulation at this emphatic moment in the novel does not do justice to his intuitions about the quality of his characters' lives. For the people of the yard are not pathetic objects at the mercy of external forces.

On the one hand there are the images of distress and vulnerability which Mais expresses better than he explains. These appear notably in his presentation of the women, Rema and Euphemia. Then there are scenes in which the sheer perplexity of being human and not in control of the inner heartland is in evidence. The following scene occurs shortly after Manny has been cast aside by Euphemia, the woman for whom he is possessed by adolescent love. Wilfie is helping Manny to fix the frame of a chicken coop:

> Wilfie held the wire in place, and Manny drove home the straightened nail, using more force than was necessary. He clinched the nail head over the wire to make it hold. His hands seemed extra big and awkward, and they were trembling a little.
>
> He took his upper lip between his teeth and bit it until he could taste the salty taste of blood in his mouth. He beat on the ground with the hammer, and Wilfie just looked at him, still without saying a word. He opened his mouth as though he was going to speak, and shut it again.
>
> (<u>The Hills Were Joyful Together</u>, pp. 162-163)

These are essentially human dilemmas and are attributable neither to society, nor to malignant chance. But perplexity and archetypal distress are not all that Mais expresses.

On the consoling side there are positives of charity embodied in Mass Mose the clarinet-player, Zephyr the prostitute, and Ras, the serene and compassionate brother; the healing power of eros seen in the relationship between Surjue and Rema, recalled with idyllic force by Surjue at the time of greatest despair (p.245); the sense of community in the yard, and an elemental and rhythmic energy which binds them all together on the night of the fish-fry (pp. 48-52) when they enact in song and dance the miracle of crossing a swollen river.

The elements of tragedy are present in The Hills Were Joyful Together but Mais' philosophy is too far behind his intuitions. The authorial intrusions are the most obvious signs of strain on the art. Indignation takes precedence over artistic contemplation.

"Somehwere in the world something to redeem them...resolve their doubts, blot out their deeds" Mais had compassionately cried out in one of the choruses in The Hills Were Joyful Together. In Brother Man, still concerned with his slum-dwellers, Mais develops one of the positives of the earlier work. The novel explores the protective possibility of Messianic leadership. The theme is still an obviously social one, but we do not find here the protesting energy as before. The scene is still a slum yard. The novel, however, is built around a central character Bra' Man, and instead of those awkward and pretentious-sounding authorial intrusions we have a "Chorus of People in the Lane". Brother Man is divided into five books or acts, and the Chorus appears not at the beginnings of chapters but at the beginnings of the acts. However realistic the details in each book the Chorus comments upon them as particular demonstrations of human suffering. The function of the Chorus is not to point out the specialness of the Jamaican

yard-dwellers situation nor is it to offer philosophic generalisations. Its function is to take a rueful yet detached view of the action, abstracting its essential repetitive humanity: "The tongues in the lane clack-clack almost continuously, going up and down the full scale of human emotions, human folly, ignorance, suffering, viciousness, magnanimity, weakness, greatness, littleness, insufficiency, frailty, strength" (p.7). This is a technical improvement upon the previous novel but it is upon the characterisation of Bra' Man that the novel depends.

An extended parallel between the life and Crucifixion of Christ and that of Bra' Man is an explicit attempt to universalise the situation. But the central character lacks fictional credibility. Mais introduces arbitrary visions and apparitions (p.69 and pp. 75-76) miracles (p.120 and p.131) naive moralising (incident of the crab and the little boy pp. 71-75) and Bra' Man is described among the multitude in Biblical prose:

> And through him blessing came to the people in the lane, even to those who did not go out to receive it. People came up to him in the crowd, and touched their handkerchiefs against his clothes, and came away again, and laid the handkerchiefs on their sick, and they became well. <u>And Bra'Man didn't even know it was done.</u>
>
> He went among them blessing them and healing them, and a crowd followed him one day <u>from the market at the foot of King Street, the principal street in the city,</u> because one woman had recognised him, and she called the attention of the others, pointing him out. (<u>Brother Man</u>, p.109)

I have italicised places where Mais tries to make Bra' Man viable as a separate character, not a copy of Jesus, but the parallels are too explicit. Mais' intensity has an obverse side: no other West Indian writer would have created a scene like this without a comic intention.

A consideration of the relationship between Bra' Man and the girl Minette throws further light on Mais' failure with the central character. Bra' Man rescues Minette from the desperate beginnings of prostitution and brings her to live in his house. He remains apparently oblivious to her female presence.

Minette, troubled by Papacita's advances, and in love with Bra' Man reflects on her situation:

> And it made her feel all the more impatient with Bra' Man for how could he fail to see what was happening to her? How come he didn't look at her as a man might look at a woman at all? He was a holy man? Yes, so what did that matter? Only among the Roman Catholics a thing like that mattered. And Bra' Man wasn't like that at all. He was like other people - all the people who lived in the lane, for instance; only he saw things a little different from them. And he was better than them, yes. But all the same a man, and in his prime. (Brother Man, p.33)

It is not clear whether Minette is introduced as a sleeping temptation to Bra' Man, a proof of his spirituality or as the chosen one of the prophet. Mais tries to have it both ways:

> Minette woke up in the middle of the night to find Brother Man, holding a lighted candle in his hand, staring down into her face.
> She started up, frightened, her blood suddenly racing.
> 'What's the matter Bra' Man?' she said
> 'Nothing, daughter,' he murmered, unmoving. 'Hush, go back to sleep.'
> He still held the candle aloft, looking down into her face intently, as though searching for something there.
> She felt oddly shaken, disturbed, she knew not how or why.
> (Brother Man, p.99)

Minette's innocence is quite incredible but the reason for it is that Mais is worried about the sexlessness of his hero as a man and at the same time feels it necessary to keep him Christ-like and chaste. When Minette's nightdress falls open revealing her breasts,

> He rested the candle on the table, drew up a stool beside her cot, and sat down. She saw that he had the Bible in his hand. He opened it and read aloud:
> Praise ye the Lord,
> Praise God...
> (Brother Man, p.99)

Chastity wins. It is important to note that the scene is not intentionally funny.

This episode looke like a "temptation" scene, and such a reading seems justified in the light of Bra' Man's triumphant mission which begins shortly afterwards. But if the need for a Christ pulls Mais in one direction, the instinct to be faithful to the situation he has created pulls the author in another.

In the middle of his mission, Bra' Man succumbs to Minette. Kneeling on the cold floor beside him, she presses Bra' Man's hands against her breasts:

> He looked down at her, started to shake his head... their eyes met, held an instant. Something like an involuntary spasm shuddered through his flesh.
>
> His hands jerked away suddenly. He got to his feet so quickly that the stool went over behind him. He stumbled rather than walked away, leaving her kneeling on the floor.
>
> He turned, looked at her, saw that she was sobbing, her hands pressed to her face; her shoulders were shaking with her sobs.
>
> Something like an animal cry went from him. He blundered back across the distance that separated them, went down on his knees beside her on the floor. (Brother Man, pp. 136-137)

Mais will not allow intercourse by passion, but intercouse through compassion is allowable for the Christ-character. Mais' failure with Bra' Man as a fictional character lies in this: the conflict which ought to be located in the character shows as an uncertainty of intention in the author.

With the inevitable "crucifixion" of Brother Man ("When they had mauled him to the satisfaction of their lust, they voided on him and fouled him" p.188) Mais' exploration of the redeeming power of a Messiah comes to an end. But Mais' idealisation of the hero cannot allow disillusionment to be registered. Instead, the shock of failure is plastered over by an ambiguous "vision of certitude". On the third day after his "crucifixion" Brother Man stands at a window looking out. Minette tries to console him:

> They'll all come crawlin' to you yet, an' beg you to forgive them.'
>
> He just bowed his head before her. His heart was too full to speak.
>
> He was all things that lay before him in a vision of certitude, and he was alone no longer.
>
> 'Look at me', he said.
>
> Her gaze met his, unfaltering.
>
> 'You see it, out there, too?'
>
> She looked up above the rooftops where that great light glowed across the sky.
>
> She said: 'Yes, John, I have seen it.'
>
> 'Good,' he said, and again, 'Good'. (Brother Man, p.191)

The only certitude here is that Minette loves him. But unless we are meant to imagine that Bra' Man is indulging in a superior irony over Minette, the novel ends too optimistically.

The rejection of Bra' Man, like the crucifixion of Christ, was a revelation of human contrariety. The capriciousness of the multitude who had previously worshipped Bra' Man, and the wild impulse by which they become a mob to destroy the one upon whom they found themselves depending were the result of inner not outer pressures. With Brother Man Mais could not help realising that his raw material was within the human person, beyond social mechanisms.

In Black Lightning Mais achieves at last the classic proportion of tragedy. There is no social density. The setting of the novel is remote, self-contained, rural. The central character is Jake, an artist-blacksmith and the central symbol is Samson. But whereas the parallel between Bra' Man and Christ had been imposed by the author, the fictional character being idealised beyond credibility, Mais now invests in the character's consciousness - it is Jake who fastens upon Samson as a model. Initially it is a case of self-indulgent identification, for Jake sees Samson as a figure of strength:

> There were times when Jake, too, used to take long walks by himself into the woods, and he knew what it was that Amos got from that feeling of being withdrawn from the world. He got the same feeling from being alone with his carving. Healing went with it, and a sense of stillness and peace. And a feeling too that a man is alone in the world and sufficient, and not dependent upon anyone. (Black Lightning, pp. 90-91)

The replacement of Christ by Samson is a fortunate one, for Samson is a symbol of both weakness and strength, an archetype of the human person. Because he is working the parallel through the consciousness of Jake, Mais is able to exploit the ironies of the situation to the full. Jake's growing awareness of these ironies is the dramatic and disconcerting process of the novel.

When the novel begins, Jake is at work on a carving of Samson in solid mahogany. But it is apparent that something has begun to go wrong with his conception. For his wife Estella leaves him largely because she intuits that he resents his dependence upon her. With Estella's flight, Jake comes to realise with growing dismay that even a strong man has to lean on others, on

cripples like Amos and on plump insensitive folk like Bess. As his complacency begins to crumble, the carving of the Samson seems to take "its own end into its own hands", becoming "what it wants to be...". When at last Jake reveals the Samson to Amos, the carving is not one of Samson in his prime, but the blinded Samson, a figure of ruined strength leaning on a little boy:

> Amos looked, and he tried to say something, but words would not come to him.
> 'Do you see what I see?' said Jake. And without taking his eyes off the statue: 'Why don't you say something? Are you dumb? His hand reached out, and clutched the other's shoulder. You are shaking like a leaf! Are you afraid? There's nothing here to be afraid of. There's nobody going to hurt you. ...
> And Amos said slowly: 'I see it, Jake. What - what you wanted me to see. Yes, I see it now. I see what you mean. It ain't Samson anymore, is what you mean; ain't it?
> 'What is it then?' tensely. 'Tell me. Perhaps you can tell me.'
> (Black Lightning, p.112)

With the tragic discovery of his own and Samson's dependent humanity, Jake moves inevitably to an aristocratic suicide.

But the total effect of the novel is not gloomy pessimism. The tragedy is dispersed in several ways. Complementary to the story of Jake in the relationship between Glen and Miriam - contrary and antagonistic at first, but resolving itself in an acceptance of the need to be dependent. Although this view of love had been present in The Hills Were Joyful Together and had recurred in Brother Man with Shine and Jesmina, it is in Black Lightning that it becomes central as an instinctive and consoling positive in a tragic design.

Another consolatory positive that emerges in the novel is the drawing together in community of characters like Amos, Bess and Estella who began by being antagonistic to one another.

The natural setting is also crucial. Jake's alienation belongs to a pattern which includes George's spontaneous affinity with nature, and the youth's exulting ride on the mare Beauty. Since the human crises in the novel are made to coincide

with phenomena in nature, the rhythmic parallel suggests further relief. All these motifs are caught up in the final action of the novel, where we can see how the actual presentation of Jake's suicide contributes to our sense of renewal after destruction.

Jake had asked about Samson: "Where will he take that burden to its last resting-place and set it down? And be restored to himself again, whole?' (p.110). It is by a strict logic to the situation and the character that for Jake as for Samson the resting-place should be self-destruction. Jake must pull down his own self and hostile temple. The restorative aspect of the suicide is emphasised by its taking place in a burgeoning wood after the flood: "Birds sang from the wood again, and little by little it lost the dank peaty smell of sodden rotting vegetation. It smelled again sweet and fresh like the face of a young girl" (p.201)[8]. But at the same time as Jake embraces his death, Amos and Estella make their compact in the wood. George and Beauty are exulting in that gallop across the common. Glen and Miriam come together:

> 'The wood is so full of peace.... If I had to die, I think I would like to die out here.'
> His arm tightened about her waist.
> 'Don't talk about dying. We want to live. Ain't it?'
> 'Yes, Glen. We want to live... for a long, long time....'
> 'That's the way to talk, girl, that's the stuff.'

Jake's suicide shot sounds from another part of the wood. But Mais faces death with an assertion of life. It is a long way from the death of Surjue in The Hills Were Joyful Together;

> He fell spread-eagled on his back and lay still.
> A scudding, shapeless mass of filmy clouds drew over the face of the moon. The stars put out again.
> A dog howled in the darkness outside the wall.
> He lay on his back, his arms flung wide, staring up at the silent unequivocal stars. (The Hills Were Joyful Together, p.288)

And there is more conviction in Glen's and Miriam's tentative embrace than in the "vision of certitude" of Brother Man.

---

[8]In this quotation and in the one following, Mais' dialogue, never quite convincing sounds like a Hollywood script. But the context seems to distract us from niggling.

Mais' sense of the tragic in life, and his compassionate understanding were stimulated by the society in which he lived. In his most assured fiction he attained to a universal tragic vision by separating the stimulus from its special social context. There will be more to say about the relationship between society and literature in Mais' novels in the course of the next section.

(ii) Concubinage in West Indian Fiction

Concubinage exists among a large proportion of the poorer classes in the West Indies. But those who live in this way are at least aware of the legal marriage institution. The purpose of this section is to see how inventive West Indian writers may be in handling this aspect of their social raw material.

Of the flat appearance of concubinage as a fact of life in some West Indian novels, little needs to be said. Only the reader with preconceptions about horrid Black sexuality or romantic Negro spontaneity will tend to misinterpret these.

The predominant attitude in those novels which draw attention to the fact of concubinage is a comic one. For our purposes here, it is not necessary to draw a distinction between the comic and the satiric so I shall treat them as the same. The earliest precedent is to be found in Tom Redcam's One Brown Girl And - (1909) where social protest and the comedy of social pretension co-exist a little uncomfortably. The disappearance of Mrs. Gyrton's husband exposes the woman to hard times. Grant proposes to her that since her husband is dead she should find it convenient to live with another man who will take care of her material needs for the usual domestic returns. Mrs. Gyrton replies to the effect that in such a case, it would be just as well to get married.

> 'No' said the man bluntly 'it is a damned different thing. If I married you I take up the whole of the load and I tie it on me back wid rope and chain and not wid twine - twine you can break but rope you can't break nor can you cut chain. This way I tek up only what I want to carry and the day I tired I put it down the same place.'

To this, Mrs. Gyrton seems to be unwilling to agree:

'But you know, Mr. Grant I is a married woman, and from the beginning I always stand up for married and moralment. I is a woman gots church connection.' In that last phrase she embodied the fact of a casual attendance at a church where her name stood on the membership roll with the supposition that she paid church dues anchored to some unredeemed promise sunk deep in the years.[9]

Redcam's use of dialect and homely images in Grant's speech tends to provoke some laughter, but a different kind of comic effect is obvious in the handling of Mrs. Gyrton whose social pretension is reiterated in the long debate between herself, Rosabella and her other friends as to what reply should be given to Mr. Grant. Broggins and White advise Mrs. Gyrton to pray. Rosabella, who is a White man's mistress, realistically urges her to snatch the opportunity:

'But', objected Mrs. Gyrton, though she showed very little spirit, 'I belong to church and you don't; you know dat, Rosabella. I use to pray and you don't.'

'Pray,' said Rosabella angrily, 'and why I can't pray as good as you? And who de debil tell you I don't pray? And I can't pray? I tell you dis. I will pray you blind if you want try.'

At the end of the debate, Mrs. Gyrton is almost about to yield but she is given a final word on the question:

'I is a married woman', said the Carpenter's wife almost plaintively, Backra dem all know me, dat I set me face against sin. I can go a sacrament any time. Rosabella, you know you can't take sacrament.'[10]

Apart from two Pioneer Press publications[11] in which the earnest authors view concubinage as disgrace, and Christian marriage as a sign of at least social salvation, few West Indian writers have missed the comic possibilities of the depressed Negro aspiring towards marriage for the wrong social reasons. With Alvin Bennett's God the Stonebreaker (1964) the comic situation is given a peculiar pathos. Bennett is able to see the ludicrous side of GB's ambition to marry Billy Toms, and he recounts her cunning procedures with great zest. But when Toms dies of a heart attack, Bennett does full justice to the character's longing without making a sentimental issue out of it:

---

9 One Brown Girl And -, p.32

10 One Brown Girl And - pp. 34 and 37

11 See W. G. Ogilvie Cactus Village (1953) and C. Everard Palmer A Broken Vessel, (1960)

He died during the night, leaving GB in the depths of a grief she had never before experienced. She wept bitterly for a long period and refused to be comforted by Sue or anyone else. In her crushing distress, she soliloquized between sobs:

'Now me will never get a chance to marry again! Poor me bitch! Me is not born to marry. Look 'ow near me go to it and fail! Oh God! Such a good, kind man 'e was. If 'im was not so stubborn, me could be Mrs. T. now, instead of the damned GB. Me tired of the name.'

Eventually GB found consolation in the inheritance automatically falling to her. (God the Stonebreaker, p.87)

The desire to move from concubinage to marriage ceases to be predominantly comic in the burning pages of Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965) where social and economic protest and a recognition of the natural vulnerability of woman make the urge a desperate impulse to survive. When Nathan deceives Ruby into thinking he will marry her, and Ruby breaks the news to her lover, Willy-Willy, the latter threatens to recover the few gifts he has made her. Ruby makes a plea for understanding that touches upon inner and outer needs:

'Look at it this way, Willy-Willy. Look at the facts this way. Nathan offering the ring. You is Milton' father. But I have wait' ten yeers whilst you put me off and put me on, and now I relieving you of your burdens. Willy-Willy ... every woman want' to know she have her own-own man sleeping 'side o' her at nights... and I not any different from any other woman... thousands o' womens thinks in that fashion. A wedding ring does do wonders to a woman' heart, Willy-Willy, and I need a husband.'

(Amongst Thistles and Thorns, p.124)

The three works from which I have quoted seem to represent the range of conscious attitudes to concubinage in West Indian fiction. In these works, and others like them, the effects depend upon the acknowledged existence of church or legal marriage in the fictional worlds. I want now to turn to works in which there are no conscious attitudes to concubinage, and no legal marriage. For it is in these novels that the most general effect of concubinage on West Indian fiction can be most clearly seen: marriage themes like those in the English novel seldom appear. It would be easy, in the light of minor Victorian fiction on the marriage question, to construe this as a self-evident advantage, but an example from a rich and satisfying work will help to show that I am only trying to suggest differences

from the English novel. In George Eliot's Middlemarch, Dorothea, although disillusioned about Casaubon, does not seek fulfilment for herself elsewhere, but resolves to endure her suffering and detestable husband; Lydgate continues to minister to the shallow and egoistic Rosamond; and Mrs. Bulstrode remains wedded to her exposed partner. In George Eliot's conception these characters are agents of an extra-ordinary compassion which does not admit of a one-sided solution. But it also happens to be true that the possibilities open to the fictional characters are limited by the marriage bond. It is slightly ironic, in view of George Eliot's own unconventional behaviour, that what happens next in the novel, however liberal or humane, happens within the convention.

In West Indian novels of the kind under discussion, on the other hand, there are no such restrictions either in the authors' minds or in the fictional worlds. The best examples occur in the work of Roger Mais. When Shag discovers that his woman Euphemia is unfaithful, he packs his suitcase and disappears (The Hills Were Joyful Together, 1953),; Papacita in Brother Man (1954) tires of Girlie, so he finds lodgings in another part of the city; and when, in Black Lightning (1955), Estella decides to leave Jake, she departs without so much as leaving the customary dramatic intimation. The Mais character does not have legal or moral sanctions operating against him in the fictional world, nor do these lurk in his consciousness. Before arguing that this apparent licence is only an illusion, I want to show its peculiar possibilities by contrasting it with the marriage-adultery-divorce complex in two English novels.

Both in Lady Chatterley's Lover and in Graham Greene's The End of the Affair, adultery is seen from the point of view of the rebelling character. It is either liberating and revolutionary (Constance Chatterley and Mellors), or nervous and full of guilt (Sarah and Bendrix), but in both cases, however much the reader may be made aware that the adulterous characters are pursuing existential needs, their

consciousness of guilt or freedom is partly a function of their attitudes to marriage (which is posited as a socially approved institution in the worlds of the novels). There is no reason, in a freely conceived art of fiction why a creative artist should necessarily make carry-overs of this kind from the outer social situation into the imagined construct. Indeed, this can be a severe restriction upon the artist's prerogative to invent. But like most novelists, the two under discussion make a realistic transfer: Constance and Sarah are in different ways, reacting to marriage. Once Sarah's sense of guilt is set in motion, Greene has little further interest in the husband who becomes an anonymous peripheral figure. This tactful plot device has the minimally acceptable virtue of leaving the husband's story to be told at another time... in another place. But the implicit bias, and the way in which the novelists' attitudes and devices are determined by their awareness of marriage as a social institution become strikingly obvious in Lady Chatterley's Lover. Lawrence finds himself distracted into weighting the scales against Clifford Chatterley not only because he stands for the "wrong" approach to sex and life, but also, simply, because he is the legal husband. In order to arrive at his primary concern - an exploration of Cannie's compulsive quest for fulfilment - Lawrence felt it necessary to work through the ruins of the social institution. The tendency of not a few critics to take Clifford's side in discussion of the novel was only a sign that the distraction into a social issue affected not only the novelist but the reception of the work. The spectacular fulfilment came during the obscenity trial of 1960 (Regina v. Penguin Books Limited) when, on the third day, in the words of C. H. Rolph, "it had become plain that the Prosecution had taken a new turn. The gravamen of the charge was now that the book was about adultery. ... Lady Chatterley was indeed on trial. By implication, if only she and Mellors had been husband and wife, then whatever they did and wherever they did it, all would have been well, the marriage certificate shielding the susceptible against depravity and corruption."[12]

---

[12] The Trial of Lady Chatterley /transcript of the trial/ ed. C. H. Rolph (1961) p.63

Returning to Mais' fiction two features stand out immediately: the novelist's "cases" are looked at not in a one-sided way, but from points of feeling within both parties. Closely related to this compassionate approach is the purity of impulse by which Mais expresses and progessively explores the contradictions and possibilities of sexual relationships and love. To restrict ourselves to one aspect for the moment, running through the novels is Mais' intuition of the profound and involuntary nature of the bond between male and female. There is an air of unfinished business between the physically separated characters: Shag broods in tortured exile while Euphemia lives in an expectant and trapped state of fear; in spite of Girlie's revulsion from Papacita, his departure brings not release but increasing tension; and Estella having failed to make good her departure returns care-worn to haunt the wilderness near Jake's house. It is tempting to say that Mais expresses a bond more profound than legal marriage, but the point is that Mais' handling of this area of human experience is more obviously universal than Lawrence's precisely because the writer from Jamaica never once lapses into comparisons with, or polemics against the social institution. If, with this essential point in mind, we nevertheless pursue the comparison, a useful distinction emerges. The dying Shag returns at last to fell Euphemia with his machete; and Girlie wins an insane freedom by stabbing Papacita: in the Mais novels, separation between sexual partners is effected not by divorce but by double deaths. The contrast between sexual partners is not for Mais a social contract of convenience.

In each of his more socially realistic works, The Hills Were Joyful Together and Brother Man, Mais included a pair of lovers at self-destructive cross-purposes. In contrast to these were pairs of lovers in harmony against their depressing social situation. In Black Lightning as is argued above, Mais expresses a tragic vision of a basic contrariety in man's condition and it is in this context that the author does artistic justice to his intuitions about the nature of love. It

is projected in two ways: as a profound, sometimes perverse inner complexity symbolic of man's basic contrariety; and at the same time, more tentatively, it is seen as a fragile value, an expression of man's protective need in a tough world. I do not wish to suggest that the tragic view and the discovery of a moral positive were the necessary, direct outcome of the fact that Mais' characters derive from a social milieu in which concubinage is practised. But it seems reasonable to argue that the absence of a legal marriage convention in the society with which he was dealing was the basis of Mais' uninhibited and intuitive expression of these as natural conflicts or instinctive compacts in a free situation in his earlier novels. These expressions facilitated Mais' intellectual discovery of love's essential ambivalences. The insights gained inform his presentation of love in the classic patterns of Black Lightning a novel described in the preceding section.

The World of 'A House for Mr. Biswas'

V. S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas (1964) takes the form of fictive biography beginning with the inauspicious birth of Mr. Biswas in an obscure village, and ending with his death in the city forty-six years later. But Naipaul elects to explore and interpret the life and achivement of Mr. Biswas against a dense and changing background: the fiction also represents, in less depth, contingencies in the lives of three generations of the Tulsis, an Indian family into which Mr. Biswas came to be married. Inevitably the novel has been seen as providing a picture of Indian life in the West Indies with Hanuman House, the Tulsi family residence at Arwacas, becoming representative: "Before Mr. Biswas, the West Indian East Indian was without form features or voice. Now we know more about Hanuman House than we do about Brandt's Pen [in John Hearne's novels] or the Village of Love [in a novel by Merrill Ferguson]."[13] In fact, the kind of family life represented at Hanuman House no longer exists in Trinidad. A brief account of the outer socio-historical situation upon which the novel draws may be useful.

13E. R. Brathwaite 'Roots' in Bim, July-December, 1963.

After Negro Emancipation, India became the main oversea source of cheap labour for the British sugar islands: between 1839 and 1917 no fewer than 416,000 indentured Indians were imported as substitutes for the freed Negroes. These new slaves were procured in the poverty-stricken districts of India; most of them were transported to Guyana (239,000) and to Trinidad (134,000) where labour problems had been particularly acute.[14] Today, descendants of Indians comprise 49per cent. of the population of Guyana and 35 per cent. of that of Trinidad. Writing about the social structure of Guyana, a sociologist who has spent many years in the area generalises about the Indians: "In 1917, the system of organised immigration ceased, and after that time very few people entered the country from India. Even during the nineteenth century there had been a marked tendency for Indian languages to be replaced by the Guianese lower-class dialect of English, and now this process was accelerated until today Indian languages are practically never used except on ritual occasions when they are about as widely understood as Latin is among Roman Catholics in England. The same thing happened in other fields of culture, such as dress, home furnishing, and recreational activities. This process of 'creolisation' affected nearly all aspects of life so that customs and forms of social structure which superficially appear to be entirely 'Indian' are in fact sharply modified by the local environment."[15] The same general process of 'creolisation' has taken place in Trinidad, possibly at a faster rate than in Guyana.

But at first, the Indians kept to themselves, and the better off ones retained a family life in many respects similar to that fictionalised in A House for Mr. Biswas.

> ...The organisation of the Tulsi house was simple. Mrs. Tulsi had only one servant, a negro woman who was called Blackie by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, and

---

[14] A simplified account of the labour situation in the islands after Emancipation is to be found in F. R. Augier and Others The Making of the West Indies (1960) pp. 182-210. Indian immigration figures are taken from this text-book.

[15] Raymond T. Smith British Guiana (1962) pp. 109-110.

> Miss Blackie by everyone else. Miss Blackie's duties were vague. The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the store. The husbands, under Seth's supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after Tulsi animals, and served in store. In return they were given food, shelter, and a little money; their children were looked after; and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis.
> (A House for Mr. Biswas pp. 87-88)

The quotation comes from the earlier section of a novel that spans a period of forty-six years - the span of Mr. Biswas' life. Over this fictional period, Naipaul chronicles the dissolution of Tulsi family life. The closing chapters of the novel are set in the city, Port of Spain, where in a crowded house owned by Mrs. Tulsi, the Tulsi daughters and their husbands coexist with one another as separate economic units, and the children are involved in the colonical scramble for education:

> In the house the crowding became worse. Basdai, the widow, who had occupied the servant room as a base for a financial assault on the city, gave up that plan and decided instead to take-in boarders and lodgers from Shorthills. The widows were now almost frantic to have their children educated. There was no longer a Hanuman House to protect them; everyone had to fight for himself in a new world, the world Owad and Shekhar had entered, where education was the only protection. As fas as the children graduated from the infant school at Shorthills they were sent to Port of Spain. Basdai boarded them.
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.393)

A House for Mr. Biswas has resonances we would not expect in a sociologist's account: Basdai for instance is being satirised for the profit motive, and the throngs of children become functions of Mr. Biswas' agrophobia; but the rapid disintegration of the Tulsi outpost following their momentous move from Arwacas to Shorthills corresponds to the break-up of Indian family life described by Naipaul himself in a non-fictional work:

> The family life I have been describing began to dissolve when I was six or seven; when I was fourteen it had ceased to exist. Between my brother, twelve years younger than myself and me there is more than a generation of difference. He can have no memory of that private world which survived with such apparent solidity up to only twenty-five years ago, a world which had lengthened out, its energy of inertia steadily weakening from the featureless area of darkness which was India.[16]

---

[16] V. S. Naipaul An Area of Darkness (1964) pp. 37-38.

Naipaul was born in 1932. If we accept his non-fictional word, the crucial period of dissolving would have been between 1938 and 1944. In the novel, Mr. Burnet, the editor of the Sentinel is sacked at the beginning of 1940; Mr. Biswas receives a letter from him at Christmas. It is at the next Christmas mentioned in the novel and still during the war that Mr. Biswas hears of the Tulsis' decision to leave Arwacas. We can thus date the abandonment of Hanuman House as between 1941 and 1945: so close does the novel's calendar run to the factual one.

More important than this kind of accuracy is the way in which Naipaul uses the Tulsi cultural hulk in the creation of nightmare world for Mr. Biswas; but not to be aware that Hanuman House represents something in the Trinidad Indian past; and not to be aware of the sense in which A House for Mr. Biswas is a historical novel is to follow Brathwaite (in the article already cited):

> ...[I]n the world of Hanuman House, we have the first novel [from the West Indies] whose basic theme is not rootlessness and the search for social identity; in A House for Mr. Biswas we have at last a novel whose central character is clearly defined and who is really trying to get in rather than get out.[17]

A House for Mr. Biswas I would suggest is the West Indian novel of rootlessness par excellence. We are in a better position to take this view if we recognise the novel's historicity. For convenience the case may be put like this: Mr. Biswas is an Indian who marries into an Indian enclave in Trinidad between the Wars: he recognises the blinkered insulation of this world from the outside, and he senses its imminent dissolution. He spends most of his life trying to escape the embrace of this dead past only to find that the future, the colonial society upon which he wishes to make his mark is as yet uncreated. Mr. Biswas struggles between the tepid chaos of a decaying culture and the void of a colonial society. To put it like this to gloss C. L. R. James' remark that "Mr. Biswas is a universal character, but after reading A House for Mr. Biswas many of our people have a deeper understanding of the West Indies than they did before."[18] The point cannot be over-emphasised,

---

17E. R. Braithwaite in 'Roots', cited above.

18C. L. R. James Party Politics in the West Indies (Vedic Enterprises Ltd., San Juan, Trinidad: 1962) p.150.

but I want to pursue another kind of argument. At the height of his isolation at Green Vale, living in a barrack so determined is he to resist the protectiveness of Hanuman House, Mr. Biswas moves rapidly towards nervous collapse:

> Every night he bolted himself in his room. As soon as he was still he felt the stillness around him and he had to make movements to destroy the stillness, to challenge the alertness of the room and the objects in it.
>
> He was rocking hard on the creaking board one night when he thought of the power of the rockers to grind and crush and inflict pain, on his hands and toes and the tenderer parts of his body. He rose at once in agony, covering his groin with his hands, sucking hard on his teeth, listening to the chair as rocking, it moved sideways along the cambered plank. The chair fell silent. He looked away from it. On the wall he saw a nail that could puncture his eye. The window could trap and mangle. So could the door. Every leg of the green table could press and crush. The castors of the dressing table. The drawers. He lay face down on the bed, not wanting to see; and, to drive out the shapes of objects from his head, he concentrated on the shapes of letters, working out design after design for the letter R. At last he fell asleep, with his hands covering the vulnerable parts of his body, and wishing he had hands to cover himself all over. In the morning he was better; he had forgotten his fears.
>
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.207)

When the breakdown comes, Mr. Biswas is carried to Hanuman House:

> Lying in room next to Shama's, perpetually dark, Mr. Biswas slept and woke and slept again. The darkness, the silence, the absence of the world enveloped and comforted him. At some time far-off he had suffered great anguish. He had fought against it. Now he had surrendered, and this surrender had brought peace .... Surrender had removed the world of damp walls and paper covered walls, of hot sun and driving rain, and had brought him this: this worldless room, this nothingness. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.269)

However much the novel may be concerned with the pressures of the socio-historical situation already described, the intensity of Mr. Biswas' emotion and the extremes between which he swings suggest that in A House for Mr. Biswas the artist is creating a special kind of world. In the rest of this discussion I propose to examine the fictional world in which Mr. Biswas toils and his characteristic responses to it.

Before introducing the Tulsis, Naipaul seeks to establish the insignificance of Mr. Biswas' birth and the lack of prospects before him. F. Z. Ghany the squalid solicitor assigns him an arbitrary date of birth and the schoolteacher, Lal, whips him into learning that "ought oughts are ought".

In this section too, the author's chronicling voice relentlessly anticipates a visit by the adult Mr. Biswas to the place of his birth and early years where he only finds "oil derricks and grimy pumps, see-sawing, see-sawing, endlessly, surrounded by red No Smoking notices" (p.38). Frustrated by a series of unsatisfactory jobs - apprentice pundit, rum shop attendant, bus conductor - and languishing in the back trace at Pagotes, Mr. Biswas finds romance in the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli and becomes an addict of Samuel Smiles:

> ...Samuel Smiles was as romantic and satisfying as any novelist, and Mr. Biswas saw himself in many Samuel Smiles heroes: he was young, he was poor, and he fancied he was struggling. But there always came a point when resemblance ceased. The heroes had rigid ambitions and lived in countries when ambitions could be pursued and had a meaning. He had no ambition, and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motorbus, what could he do? What could he invent? (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.71)

Mr. Biswas is literate but his frustration is similar in conditioning to the frustration of the deprived characters in other West Indian novels like Roger Mais' The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953) and Austin Clarke's Survivors of the Crossing (1964). The difference between social comment and fictive generation begins to emerge however when we follow Mr. Biswas on his job-hunting walk along the Main road of Pagotes:

> ...He passed dry goods shops - strange name: dry goods - and the rickety little rooms bulged with dry goods, things like pans and plates and bolts of cloth and cards of bright pins and boxes of thread and shirts on hangers and brand-new oil lamps and hammers and saws and clothes-pegs and everything else, the wreckage of a turbulent flood which appeared to have forced the doors of the shops open and left deposits of dry goods on tables and on the ground outside. The owners remained in their shops, lost in the gloom and wedged between dry goods. The assistants stood outside with pencils behind their ears or pencils tapping bill-pads with the funereally coloured carbon paper peeping out from under the first sheet. Grocers' shops, smelling damply of oil, sugar and salted fish. Vegetable stalls, damp but fresh and smelling of earth. Grocers' wives and children stood oily and confident behind counters. The women behind the vegetable stalls were old and correct with thin mournful faces; or they were young and plump with challenging and quarrelsome stores; with a big-eyed child or two hanging about behind the purple sweet potatoes to which dirt still clung; and babies in the background lying in condensed milk boxes. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.62)

The world becomes for Mr. Biswas dingy, overcrowded and smelly, with inconsequential objects and derelict human beings stranded in gloom and grease. Naipaul's intense observation of the superficies of things becomes the character's vision of a sordid contingent reality; although Naipaul invests Mr. Biswas with a capacity for life that cannot be entirely discouraged. ("He had begun to wait, not only for love, but for the world to yield its sweetness and romance. He deferred all his pleasure in life until that day") Mr. Biswas' nausea is unchecked: "...Few persons now held him. Same features always finally repelled, a tone of voice, a quality of skin, an over-sensuous hang of lip; one such lip had grown gross and obscene in a dream which left him feeling unclean" (p.71).

This repellent world is never far from Mr. Biswas' senses. With the introduction of the Tulsi ambience Naipaul makes his fictional world even more coarse-grained, chaotic, over-crowded and suffocating. Waiting for the appearance of Mrs. Tulsi at that fateful interview ("So you really do like the child?"), Mr. Biswas is assaulted by the disposition of the Tulsi furniture:

> The most important piece of furniture in the hall was a long unvarnished pitch-pine table, hard-grained and chipped. A hammock made from sugarsacks hung across one corner of the room. An old sewing machine, a baby chair and a black biscuit-drum occupied another corner. Scattered about were a number of unrelated chairs, stools and benches, one of which, low and carved with rough ornamentation from a solid block of cyp wood, still had the saffron colour which told that it had been used at a wedding ceremony. More elegant pieces - a dresser, a desk, a piano so buried among papers and baskets and other things that it was unlikely it was ever used - choked the staircase landing. On the other side of the hall there was a loft of curious construction. It was as if an enormous drawer had been pulled out of the top of the wall; the vacated space, dark and dusty, was crammed with all sorts of articles Mr. Biswas couldn't distinguish. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.79)

Earlier, Mr. Biswas had noticed the Tulsi kitchen: "It was lower than the hall and appeared to be completely without light. The doorway gaped black; soot stained the wall about it and the ceiling just above, so that blackness seemed to fill the kitchen like a solid substance" (pp. 78-79). It is this world which threatens to embrace and absorb Mr. Biswas, and Naipaul sets the stage with a highly suggestive description of Hanuman House:

> Among the tumbledown timber-and-corrugated-iron buildings in the High Street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The concrete walls looked as thick as they were, and when the narrow doors of the Tulsi Store on the ground floor were closed the House became bulky, impregnable and blank. The side walls were windowless, and on the upper two floors the windows were mere slits in the facade. The balustrade which hedged the flat roof was crowned with a concrete statue of the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman. From the ground his whitewashed features could scarcely be distinguished and were, if anything, slightly sinister, for dust had settled on projections and the effect was that of a face lit up from below.
>
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.73)

There is a great deal in this passage, but I want to concentrate on the way in which the description of Tulsi objects again automatically suggests the Tulsi people ("thick ... narrow ... blank" and the rich "hedged" which not only suggests their insulation but connects with the animal imagery Naipaul uses when establishing the Tulsis); next, the passage contains simultaneously both the protective ("fortress ... impregnable ... hedged") and the suffocating aspects of the Tulsis House ("thick ... bulky ... blank ... windowless ... mere slits"). The passage has relevance also to the Tulsis' out of date Hinduism: the explicit "alien" is followed by a reference to the monkey-god Hanuman (in effect, a ridiculing reference) which identifies the alienness of the House as its Indian pretension. But that the features of the god should be "whitewashed" and that "dust had settled on projections" contribute to our sense of the Indian culture being already out of date. More broadly, the way in which the House stands out from "among the tumble-down timber-and-corrugated-iron buildings" - the surrounding dereliction - suggests that it too cannot be far from decay. More impressionistically there seem to be suggestions too of a huge bark, hatches closed, and becalmed. All these intimations of decay, it seems to me are caught up in the ambiguity of the word "facade".

Into this specious world, Mr. Biswas is lured by the unlikely siren, Shama: "She was of medium height, slender, but firm, with fine features, and though he disliked her voice, he was enchanted by her smile" (pp. 74-75). Mr. Biswas' swan turns within seconds into a Tulsi hen. The rapid dismantling of illusion after

illusion is another feature of the world which Naipaul fashions for Mr. Biswas. Years later Mr. Biswas is to write a number of short stories to himself: "None of these stories was finished, and their theme was always the same. The hero, trapped into marriage, burdened with a family, his youth gone, meets a young girl. She is slim, almost thin, and dressed in white. She is fresh, tender, unkissed; and she is unable to bear children. Beyond the meeting the stories never went." Whenever Mr. Biswas tries to put his fantasy into practice and invites an unknown girl out, his fear of destroying his illusion leads him to recoil - "Whenever the girl accepted his invitation ... his passion at once died" (p.311). But the contigent Biswas world has long fingers. Working, by the toughest of ironies, as sole administrator of a Deserving Destitutes Fund, Mr. Biswas visits Bhandat who in fact lives with the unknown, a Chinese woman. Mr. Biswas' fantasy is destroyed. The woman is "middle-aged, very thin, with a long neck and a small face." She is also barren. The couple of romance live in the utmost squalor, and "Mr. Biswas, thinking of deafness, dumbness, insanity, the horror of the sexual act in that grimy room, felt the yellow cake turn to a sweet slippery paste in his mouth. He could neither chew nor swallow" (p.408). The characteristic Biswas nausea is followed by a destruction of all the fantasy stories of barren heroines.

Although we tend to remember the world of Hanuman House as the area of Mr. Biswas' greatest environment and revulsion, and Hanuman House as the whitest sepulchre in his life, it is worth noticing that the disillusioning Biswas world is a compound of an imprisoning, because irrelevant, cultural heritage on the one hand and a colonial society without opportunity for its members on the other. When Mr. Biswas first arrives in the city he feels "free and excited" and spends hours savouring the life in it:

> He comprehended the city whole; he did not isolate the individual, see the man behind the desk or counter, behind the pushcar or the steering-wheel of the bus; he saw only the activity, felt the call to the senses, and knew that below it all there was an excitement, which was hidden, but waiting to be grasped. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.279)

But as fruitless day follows fruitless day, disillusion sets in once more, and the world becomes again a place of dingy men behind counters, dark, diseased and repetitive:

> ...Up to this time the city had been new and held an expectation which not even the deadest two o'clock sun could destroy. Anything could happen: he might meet his barren heroine, the past could be undone, he would be remade. But now not even the thought of the Sentinel's presses, rolling out at that moment reports of speeches, banquets, funerals (with all the names and decorations carefully checked) could keep him from seeing that the city was no more than a repetition of this: this dark, dingy cafe, the chipped counter, the flies thick on the electric flex, the empty Coca Cola cases stacked in a corner, the cracked glasscase, the shopkeeper picking his teeth, waiting to close.
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.341)

In this world of illusion and crude disillusion, it is Mr. Biswas' capacity for experiencing, for responding to each tremor as if it were a cataclysm that makes him a beleaguered and incompetent being: his faith in life against all the evidence that makes him keep coming back. At times, he is merely pathetic but the Mr. Biswas we remember is the game under-dog. Lured into the Tulsi bog by their fairest flower, Mr. Biswas comes at last within range of an identifiable antagonist.

Although Chapter 3 'The Tulsis' and the next three chapters. 'The Chase', 'Green Vale' and 'A Departure' take up just over 200 pages of a 531 page novel, this section dominates most readers' impressions of the work. It is not difficult to see why. It is in this section that Naipaul establishes the Tulsis in their characteristic attitudes: Mrs. Tulsi's dramatic faint, and her foxy intimacies; Seth in bluchers and stained Khaki topee, a black notebook and ivory cigarette holder sticking out of his khaki shirt pocket; the spoilt Tulsi sons looking studious, stern, grave or querulous as occasion demands; Hari the household pundit posed enigmatically over his holy books; and Shama, Mr. Biswas' wife sighing her Tulsi sigh and wearing her martyred look. In addition to these vivid shorthands for individuals, there are the group characterizations: "the sisters" "the eaters" at the communal table, "the sleepers" unfolding beds in every available space, and "the children" who turn up everywhere. Then there are the events in the Tulsi year - deaths, weddings, prayer-meetings and Christmas: at each of these events behaviour follows a set pattern. In

this section of the novel, too, Naipaul readers characteristic Tulsi sounds (children being beaten, eaters chewing, sisters chit-chatting about husbands' illnesses) and smells (of Tulsi "bad food", and Mrs. Tulsi's medicaments, "bay rum, soft candles, Canodian Healing Oil ammonia"). Since Naipaul's art relies heavily on repetition or allusion to something already established, each episode consolidates our first impression of the crowded, noisy, ritualised life and single-attribute people.

The most obvious danger for a novelist operating in this way is that his people may become card-board figures, uninteresting with successive exposures, and may even be felt to be unfairly handled victims of an omniscient author. Naipaul does not seem to me to excape this dilemma altogether in A House for Mr. Biswas but in the chapters under discussion several factors concur to animate the Tulsis. In the first place they are seen from the outside by a Mr. Biswas whose sensitivity converts them into sinister antagonists. A good example of how Naipaul manages this is to be found in the section where Mr. Biswas the sign-painter is drawn into agreeing to marry Shama. Having slipped his "crumpled and slightly dirty" and ineffectual-looking note towards Shama, Mr. Biswas immediately regrets it. He wishes to retrieve it but is prevented from doing so by the fury of the Negro woman to whom Shama tries to sell black stockings when asked for flesh-coloured ones: "He moved towards the counter, but was driven back by the woman's fat flailing arms. Then silence fell on the shop. The woman's arms became still. Through the back doorway, to the right of the counter, Mrs. Tulsi appeared." (p.76). It is part of the narrative strategy that while Mrs. Tulsi deals with the irate woman, Mr. Biswas and the reader should remain in suspense, for in the course of the pacification the note finds its way into Mrs. Tulsi's hand. Defeated by Mrs. Tulsi's silence, Mr. Biswas slinks away, returning to spend the afternoon in furious and absorbing sign-painting. But the apparent Tulsi inaction is full of menace. When they break the stalemate, Naipaul conveys the impression of sinister doings in secret military chambers:

> Just before four, when the store closed and Mr. Biswas stopped work, Seth came, looking as though he had spent the day in the fields. He wore muddy bluchers and a stained Khaki topee; in the pocket of his sweated Khaki shirt he carried a black note book and an ivory cigarette holder. He went to Mr. Biswas and said in a tone of gruff authority, 'The old lady want to see you before you go.'

Mr. Biswas' response is that of a condemned man:

> Mr. Biswas resented the tone, and was disturbed that Seth had spoken to him in English. Saying nothing, he came down the ladder and washed out his brushes, doing his soundless whistling while Seth stood over him. The front doors were bolted and barred and the Tulsi store became dark and warm and protected. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.78)

The long silent walk through the Tulsi courtyard, past the black kitchen and into the furniture crowded hall follows. And when a creak on the staircase announces the entry of Mrs. Tulsi, things begin to move too fast for Mr. Biswas. Each of Mrs. Tulsi's question and statement sequences is followed by an increase of Tulsi background noises or punctuated by the entry of a Tulsi insider until at the end Mr. Biswas feels faces of Tulsi women and Tulsi children closing in upon him.

Naipaul's strategy of presenting the first interview with the Tulsis in these terms through Mr. Biswas' apprehensive and unaccustomed eyes is followed by the duelling that takes place between Mr. Biswas and the Tulsi high command. Mr. Biswas begins with name-calling that builds upon Naipaul's earlier dispostion of the characters. At first Mr. Biswas is too scared to show his hand so he carries on these name-calling sessions only when he is alone with his wife:

> 'How the gods, eh?' /The two Tulsi sons/
> Shama would not reply.
> 'And how the Big Boss getting on today?' That was Seth.
> Shama would not reply.
> 'And how the old queen?' That was Mrs. Tulsi. 'The old hen? The old cow?'
> 'Well nobody did ask you to get married into the family you know?'
> 'Family? Family? This blasted fowlrun you calling family?'
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.94)

When Mr. Biswas explains these nicknames to a silent Govind, a degraded son-in-law, a fellow sufferer of whom Mr. Biswas tries to make an ally, the news mysteriously

reaches Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, and Mr. Biswas is summoned to a Tulsi tribunal. But Shama is loyal. And it is interesting to note that on another level, Mr. Biswas is making love to his wife at these private naming sessions. It is at one of those sessions that there takes place the only actual love scene I have found in Naipaul's fiction:

> 'I got a name for another one of your brother-in-laws,' he told Shama that evening, lying on his blanket, his right foot on his left knee, peeling off a broken nail from his big toe. 'The constipated holy man.'
> 'Hari?' she said, and pulled herself up, realising that she had begun to take part in the game.
> He slapped his yellow, flabby calf and pushed his finger into the flesh. The calf yielded like sponge.
> She pulled his hand away. 'Don't do that. I can't bear to see you do that. You should be ashamed, a young man like you being so soft.'
> 'That is all the bed food I eating in this place.' He was still holding her hand. 'Well, as a matter of fact, I have quite a few names for him. The holy ghost. You like that?'
> 'Man!'
> 'And what about the two gods? It ever strike you that they look like two monkeys. So, you have one concrete monkey-god outside the house and two living ones inside. They could just call this place the monkey house and finish. Eh, monkey, bull, cow, hen. The place is like a blasted zoo, man.'
> 'And what about you? The barking puppy dog?'
> 'Man's best friend? He flung up his legs and his thin slack calves shook. With a push of his finger he kept the calves swinging.
> 'Stop doing that!'
> By now Shama's head was on his soft arm and they were lying side by side.
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.108)

I have italicised stages in the love-play. But the exchange is worth looking at for other reasons too.

Mr. Biswas' categorisation of the Tulsis as animals is part of a running contest. But the Tulsis can come back at him. He tells Govind that he wants to paddle his own canoe only to hear himself being called "the paddler" and is infuriated when his daughter Savi is dubbed "the little paddler" by the Tulsis. And when Biswas looks at Savi's birth certificate he responds violently to what he sees:

> Suddenly he jumped up. 'What the hell is this?'
> 'Show me.'
> He showed her the certificate. 'Look. Occupation of father. Labourer. Labourer! Me! Where your family get all this bad blood, girl?'
> 'I didn't see that?
> 'Trust Seth. Look. Name of informant: R. N. Seth. Occupation: Estate Manager.'
> 'I wonder why he do that.' (A House for Mr. Biswas, pp. 146-147)

This give and take between Mr. Biswas and the Tulsis provides much of the fun in A House for Mr. Biswas and gives life to both contestants. It also provides a cover, and indeed a mood for Naipaul's animus for the fierce authorial establishing and fixing of characters in terms of objects and animals is just contained by the fetching and carrying that goes on between the author and the clowning character.

But it seems to me that as Hanuman House ceases to be an absorbent threat to Mr. Biswas, and as the Tulsi clan begins to disintegrate, Naipaul's attitude to the Tulsis slips out of control. Naipaul renders the apoclyptic sense of the Tulsi dislodgement with skill but chokes our response to it. A long paragraph of authorial reportage precedes the Tulsis' move to the new Shorthills Estate:

> ...Shama heard its glories listed again and again. In the grounds of the estate house there was a cricket field and a swimming pool; the drive was lined with orange trees and gri-gri palms with slender white trunks, red berries and dark green leaves. The land itself was a wonder. The saman trees had lianas so strong and supple that one would swing on them. All day the immortelle trees dropped their red and yellow bird-shaped flowers through which one could whistle like a bird. Cocoa trees grew in the shade of the immortelles, coffee in the shade of the cocoa and the hills were covered with tonka bean. Fruit trees, mango, orange, avocado pear, were so plentiful as to seem wild. And there were nutmeg trees, as well as cedar, poui and the bois-Canot which was so light yet so springy and strong it made you a better cricket bat than the willow.
>
> The sisters spoke of the hills, the sweet springs and hidden waterfalls with all the excitement of people who had known only the hot open plain, the flat acres of sugarcane and the muddy ricelands. Even if one did not have a way with land as they had, if one did nothing, life could be rich at Shorthills. There was talk of dairy farming, there was talk of growing grapefruit. More particularly, there was talk of rearing sheep, and of an idyllic project of giving one sheep to every child as his very own, the foundation it was made to appear, of fabulous wealth. And there were horses on the estate: the children would learn to ride. (A House for Mr. Biswas, pp. 353-354)

The passage shifts in tone from what seems to be sympathetic infection to uncontaminated detachment but the whole is of a piece. Naipaul works up the sisters' feverish excitement about the new estate only to mock their inflated expectations and degrade it with the money motive. (It is worth pointing out that all the trees over which the sisters are reported to be idyllic are useful)

Once the move to Shorthills has been accomplished, the Tulsi slide gathers momentum. First, Mrs. Tulsi withdraws into congenial darkness:

> She had a small room on the lower floor overlooking the ruined garden and Hari's box-board temple. But her window was closed, the room was sealed against light and air, and there in an ammoniac darkness, she spent much of the day, looked after by Sushila and Miss Blackie. It was as though her energy had been stimulated only for the quarrel with Seth and, ebbing, had depressed her further into exhaustion and grief.
>
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.365)

Then three deaths in quick succession - including that of Hari the family pundit and Padma, Mrs. Tulsi's sister - deprive the organisation even further of ancient retainers. With no one to plan or direct, Tulsi husbands become individualists plundering and destroying further an already falling empire, while defenceless Tulsi widows conspire in one blighted economic project after another. The Tulsi retreat turns into an invasion. The Shorthills villagers band against them; and Tulsi mismanagement ravages and depletes the once fair land. Finally, Naipaul reflects the crumbling of the Tulsi estatlishment in the dereliction they have themselves created:

> The canal of the side of the drive was at last completely silted over and the rain, which ran down the hillside in torrents after the briefest shower, flooded the flat land. The gully, no longer supported by the roots, began to be eaten away. The old man's beard was deprived of a footing; its thin tangled roots hung over the banks like a threadbare carpet. The gully bed, washed clean of black soil and the plants that grew on it, showed sandy, then pebbly, then rocky. It could no longer be forded by the car, and the car stayed on the road. The sisters were puzzled by the erosion, which seemed to them sudden; but they accepted it as part of their fate.
>
> (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.377)

Naipaul describes 'The Shorthills Adventure' as a climatic passage in what turns out to have been only a mock-saga: "Bells were rung and gongs were struck, but the luck, the virtue, had gone out of the family" (p.377). It is the end of Hanuman House and the decline into relative obscurity of the first generation of Tulsis in the novel. Out of the dissolution the third generation Tulsis emerge in the new world where education counts. It is a chronicle of the death of one way of life and the emergence of another, but we are not permitted to imagine the Tulsis as capable either of shock or excitement.

This may appear to be cavilling at what is regarded as a major twentieth century novel. But if Naipaul's hostility to the Tulsis is in excess of what is required to win sympathy for Mr. Biswas and therefore raises doubts about the author's attitude to people, it also seems to me that the beleagured Mr. Biswas' vision of a sordid contigent reality emerges too pervasively as Naipaul's vision of the world. This impression is gained as much by the frequency with which Mr. Biswas (however appropriately) sees the world in this way as by the gratuitous descriptions of decay, disease, squalor and blight that occur in the novel. Mr. Biswas himself is not spared this withering process: "A lethargy fell over him. His face grew puffy. His complexion grew dark; not the darkness of a naturally dark skin, not the darkness of sunburn: this was a darkness that seemed to come from within, as though the skin was a marky but transparent film and the flesh below it had been bruised and become diseased and its corruption was rising." (p.529). The same vision extends to the small garden Mr. Biswas once kept: "Untended, the rose trees grew straggly and hard. A blight made their stems white and gave them sickly illformed leaves. The buds opened slowly to reveal blanched, tattered blooms covered with minute insects; other insects built bright brown domes on the stems. The lily-pond collapsed again and the lily-roots rose brown and shaggy out of the thick muddy water which was white with bubbles." (p.340).

The problem I am trying to suggest is hinted at by Naipaul's use of an Epilogue. After Mr. Biswas buys his house and learns to live with its faults, he discovers that he has been cheated of twelve feet of land on the boundary markings. He repossesses it.

> In the extra space Mr. Biswas planted a laburnum tree. It grew rapidly. It gave the house a romantic aspect, softened the tall graceless lines and provided some shelter from the afternoon sun. Its flowers were sweet, and in the still hot evenings their smell filled the house. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.526)

Another novelist might have ended the work here. But Naipaul carries on in the Epilogue to describe Mr. Biswas' loss of status his aging, his sickness and his death.

This omniscient novelist cannot allow the finite character a conventional happy ending; the Epilogue is Naipaul's ironic comment on Mr. Biswas' toil. But I would like to suggest that the irony is not directed at Mr. Biswas; rather, it intensifies his pathos. The same effect is created in the Prologue where the time and place of Mr. Biswas' death are notified and his achievement sardonically set out:

> He thought of the house as his own, though for years it had been irretrievably mortgaged. And during these months of illness and despair he was struck again and again by the wonder of being in his own house, the audacity of it: to walk in through his own front gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night, to hear no noises except those of his family, to wander freely from room to room and about his yard instead of being condemned, as before, to retire the moment he got home to the crowded room in one or other of Mrs. Tulsi's houses, crowded with Shama's sisters, their husbands, their children. As a boy he had moved from one house of strangers to another; and since his marriage he felt he had lived nowhere but in the houses of the Tulsis, and Hanuman House in Arwacas, in the decaying wooden house at Shorthills in the clumsy concrete house in Port of Spain. And now at the end he found himself in his own house on his own half-lot of land, his own portion of the earth. That he should have been responsible for this seemed to him, in these last months, stupendous. (A House for Mr. Biswas, p.8)

I have italicised places at the beginning and at the end of the paragraph where "objective" narration suggests the precariousness of Mr. Biswas' achievement. Further, while we respond to the pattern of labour and arrival in the two sentences beginning "As a boy ... earth." the repetition of the word "own" suggests the extreme self-concern to which Mr. Biswas has been driven. In his last days, by embracing an illusion he achieves a kind of satisfaction, but a satisfaction which neither the author nor the reader can feel as anything other than painful. "His own portion of the earth" has in this context a disturbing resemblance to "six feet of the country". In the sentence beginning "And during these months of illness and despair" we have not only the element of escape from the sordid Tulsis world but the impulse towards insulation - "to bar entry", "to close his windows" and "to hear no noises".

In the story related to Mr. Biswas by an oyster man the oyster man's son puts a tin on a fence and shoots it down. "'Pa' he say. 'Look. I shoot work. I shoot ambition. They dead.'" And 'Escape' is the title of the batch of

unfinished short stories Mr. Biswas writes. One suspects that the world of A House for Mr. Biswas is one modelled upon a society from which the author himself has wished to escape. But if the world as it is experienced by Mr. Biswas is both engulfing and repulsive, Mr. Biswas' characteristic response being nausea, a vital distinction is still to be made. Mr. Biswas' obstinate faith in life, his knowledge "that below it all there was an excitement which was hidden but waiting to be grasped" (p.341) is greater than the impulse to opt out. When Mr. Biswas acquiring his house, he does not so much create order as confirm its possibility. However wry the gratuitous gestures, this is Mr. Naipaul's achievement too.

(ii) Novels of Childhood

Michael Anthony's novel The Year in San Fernando records one year in the life of a twelve year old boy who leaves his native village, Mayaro, for the city, to go to school and work as a servant-companion in the house of an old lady, Mrs. Chandles. It is worth pointing out that the experiences of Francis in the novel have their real-life analogue in a year Michael Anthony himself spent in San Fernando from after Christmas 1943 to just before Christmas 1944 when he himself was twelve years old. The novel was written in England in the late 1950's and early 1960's, but Anthony's art of memory is so vivid and his artistic control so tight that never once does the mature man impose an adult's perception on his adolescent narrating character; nor does the author at any point allow the older man he has become to break into the narrative either directly or by anticipatory devices such as those used by the French Guinean Camara Laye in The African Child (1954), a book which in certain respects bears a resemblance to Michael Anthony's.

The Year in San Fernando is narrated in the first person and from beginning to end the experiencing consciousness is that of the boy. People and places are seen 'objectively' through his eyes and subjectively in terms of his responses to them. This is the source of the novel's irony:

> We had heard only very little about Mr. Chandles. The little we had heard were whispers and we didn't gather much, but we saw him sometimes leaning over the banister of the Forestry Office and indeed he was as aristocratic as they said he was. He looked tidy and elegant and he always wore jacket and tie, unusual under the blazing sun. These things confirmed that he was well off, and his manner and bearing, and the condescending look he gave everything about him, made us feel that he had gained high honours in life. (The Year in San Fernando, p.7)

But it would be a mistake to think of the work as one in which the boy is being used simply in the interests of social comment. There is indeed a vein of satire against the exploiting middle class, and some sweetly executed glances at the cultural and educational system:

> There came a fine break in the weather. For a spell we began having plenty of sun and little rain and people were saying the Indian Summer was here. But it could not be. Mr. Langley said this. Mr. Langley said the time of the Indian Summer was long past. But the rains held up, anyhow. It was as if the clouds had drained themselves out and hung there sadly because they could not rain any more. (The Year in San Fernando, p.144)

So much for the bookish teacher Langley. Yet this aspect of the novel appears only intermittently and in the most unobtrusive manner, never getting in the way of our illusion of living through the boy's consciousness. The same cannot be said about Austin Clarke's Amongst Thistles and Thorns (1965), another West Indian novel of childhood. The eye of this work is nine year old Milton Sobers. In the quotation below, the scene is a classroom in a colony. It is a state occasion and the children are singing 'Rule Britannia':

> ...The headmaster was soaked in glee. And I imagined all the glories of Britannia, our Motherland, Britannia so dear to us all, and so free; Britannia who, or what or which, had brought us out of the ships crossing over from the terrible seas from Africa, and had placed us on this island, and had given us such good headmasters and assistant masters, and such a nice vicar to teach us how to pray to God - andhe had come from England; and such nice white people who lived on the island with us, and who gave us jobs watering their gardens and taking out their garbage, most of which we found delicious enough to eat ... (Amongst Thistles and Thorns, p.12)

In Clarke's novel of childhood, the boy is used only as a different point of view from which to make social protest.

The Year in San Fernando differs from another West Indian novel of childhood, this time a much better known one. George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953) evokes the boy's world but Lamming's intention is to suggest the essential outlines of typical boyhood in a West Indian community that is growing painfully - like the four boys in the novel - into political self-awareness; and his concern to suggest the complex shiftings in the community at large, at times takes precedence over any notion of fidelity to the boys' consciousness. Michael Anthony's novel, set in the penultimate year of the Second World War, registers neither that event nor the political stirrings in Trinidad of that period.

A third West Indian novel of childhood Christopher (1959) by Geoffrey Drayton invests, like The Year in San Fernando, in the very particular consciousness of an isolated boy; and again like Anthony's novel it does not have an explicit social or political drive. But Christopher concentrates on a crucial period in the life of a boy, the pattern of the novel being insisted upon in the final paragraph when Christopher fails to suppress his desolation at the funeral of his nurse Gip. He tries to leap into the grave but is caught and taken to his anxious mother:

> ...Then as the high wall went up, she held him against her body shook and she did not know if she was weeping for Gip or weeping because he was again the child that Gip had nursed - a child ... for a few minutes more as he clung to her, he was a child - a few minutes more that were the last of his childhood.
>
> (Christopher, p.192)

This is the most contrived paragraph in the novel, but what it attempts to underline is a theme implicit in Drayton's organisation of the work. In the final paragraph of The Year in San Fernando in contrast, we find, Francis on a bus taking him back to Mayaro:

> I closed the window because the rains were almost pouring down now. I sat down cosily and there was a lot of talking inside the bus. It was cosy to sit with the windows closed and the rains pouring and the bus speeding along the wet road. The talking was very cheerful. I remembered the mountain and suddenly I looked back but all the windows

were closed because of the rains. The bus roared on and my mind went on Mrs. Chanles, who was dying, and Mr. Chandles - so stronge of late, and now homeless; and I thought also of Mrs. Princet, and I thought of Edwin and that dollar - I thought of all the mixed-up things, of all the funny things in fact, which made the year at Romaine Street.

(The Year in San Fernando, pp. 189-190)

Michael Anthony's novel does not have any such identifiable themes as 'the passing of childhood' and it seems to end without my kind of resolution. Although its language is not limp, like the language in 'Lauchmonen's' (i.e. Peter Kempodoo's) pointlessly pseudonymous account of estate life in Guiana, Guiana Boy (1960), it has been described in terms better suited to that vulgarly exotic novel of West Indian childhood:

...[The Year in San Fernando] is an apparently meaningless chronicle with no foundation in any strong or profound philosophy. It moves along unrelieved and at the end signifies little.

The reviewer, in Bim, continues patronisingly:

I feel too that there is a brave attempt at profundity somewhere in the conception of the book, but all that comes off the page is a very weak suggestion of an unreal something. If Michael Anthony had wanted to chronicle the profundities latent in a loss of innocence - which would have called for an essentially much more dynamic mind - it would have been more effective in this case, I think, to have made a passionate concentrate of what he now offers us. Seventy-five poignant pages, perhaps, might have made a masterpiece.[19]

As in Barbados, so in Jamaica - The Year in San Fernando's freedom from easily recognisable theme or social message has made it seem to be without significance. A review in The Sunday Gleaner (Jamaica) of Anthony's most recent novel[20] returns to a previous jedgement:

Just as was said of The Year in San Fernando the author is extremely accurate in portrayal of each incident so that each and every one sounds authentic so that one is forced to ask the question "so what?" or "was the story worth telling?"

Although The Year in San Fernando does not have such a clear-cut theme as Christopher and although it does not refer to the West Indian political and social

---

[19]Kevyn Arthur in Bim 41, June-December 1965.

[20]Green Days by the River, 1967.

scene as obviously as the other West Indian novels of childhood already mentioned, I want to suggest that in it, Michael Anthony is practising an art of fiction of a very subtle kind. The elucidation which follows will try to answer implicitly some of the criticisms of the novel which have been raised.

In the opening pages, Michael Anthony economically suggests the village community in terms of a landmark (the Forestry Office fenced off with spiky tiger-wire) outstanding people (the high-stepping Marva, and the elegant Mr. Chandles leaning over the Forestry Office banister) routine activity (playing cricket, throwing stones at guavas) and gossip ("Everybody knew what time of night Mr. Chandles arrived in the village and how Marva went down to the bus-stop to meet him, and how they walked up the road hugging up in the dark. Ma said as far as she knew Mr. Chandles had never arrived in the night. Anyway that did not stop the gossips, and whenever the women went to the Forestry Office they looked at Marva in a very knowing way" p.9). It must be pointed out at once that Anthony does not idealise the community; on the other hand, the social divisions which become obvious to the reader are unobtrusively suggested and Mrs. Samuels' economic exploitation of Francis' widowed mother is brought to the fore through gossip ("They said she would run her blood to water") and then siphoned off through the boy's literal consciousness ("Hearing this often I seriously feared it would happen. I always thought, if it could happen, would it happen one of these days?"). Anthony is neither setting the novel towards social protest nor preparing for the conventional contrast between integrated village and alienating city. This is not to say that there is no comparison between the village and the city; only that when the comparison is made it is not in exposition of an authorially held thesis about the relative merits of town and country. Anthony wishes to establish our faith in the pure experiencing quality of the boy's mind and the village is sensuously presented as the known and loved place, soon to become the place in memory. When Francis'

mother announces that the boy is to live in San Fernando with Mr. Chandles' mother, Francis' disturbance and his sudden nostalgia which he does not understand are expressed simultaneously in a correspondent Wordsworthian landscape:

> ... Somehow, the knowledge that I was going away made Mayaro look very strange. The lime trees looked greener for one thing, and the sudden down-sweep of the land towards the ravine, rising again at the far grassy hills seemed to make the place unusual this morning and rare.
>
> I did not know why this was so. I was sure it was I who was unusual for I was feeling that way inside me. Nearby, close to our pear trees stood the giant guava tree, just on the other side of the tiger-wire. A great many of its branches hung over to our side, and they were laden with ripe fruit and it was these that I often stoned, standing almost concealed between the pear trees.
>
> I just did not feel like stoning the guavas this morning. I saw them and they meant little to me... (The Year in San Fernando, pp. 12-13)

Instead of lengthening out this listless mood, Anthony tactfully allows Francis' mind to take the course of natural recovery; nostalgia begins to give way to anticipation of San Fernando, and the boy's contrary states are fused and intensified in a shock image of the promise and the menace of Mr. Chandles:

> And now, slowly, my thoughts shifted to the big house in San Fernando. I wished I had some idea of what it looked like. I wondered if it was as fine a building as this Forestry Office here. This was really a huge, great building. Terrific. As I turned my head to take in again the vastness of the Forestry Office, my heart almost leaped to my mouth. Just on the other side of the tiger-wire was Mr. Chandles. He smiled with me. (The Year in San Fernando, p.13)

This movement of mind is reversed on Francis' journey by bus to the town. Through the boy's alert senses, Michael Anthony recreates the sights and sounds of the journey so that the passing scene is evoked in an 'objective' way. But Anthony's purpose is not to decorate the novel with a tourist description - as a contrast, read pp. 120-122 of The African Child. We are made to enter the bewildered consciousness of the boy and the groping efforts of his mind to find a familiar resting place:

> The night was cool and it was pitch black over the far houses. All round, cafes and rum-shops were open. The noises of people talking and the noises of cars and trucks and buses rose and fell but never died away. There was no silence here. At this hour, in Mayaro, most people would have settled

in for the night. Then, all that could be heard was the barking of dogs or the cry of a cigale or the wind in the trees. Here, life was not settling down for the night. Life was teeming. The night seemed to make no difference. Every moment I was blinded by the headlamp of some vehicle. The vehicles came roaring from the wide road ahead - the San Fernando road. The noises of the town rose and fell like waves running up and down a beach in the night. There were many people in our bus now. I was feeling tired. Just across the road there was a cafe full of people. Some were eating things and some had bottles of soft drinks held up to their heads. I was feeling thirsty for a drink. The noises rose and fell and the feeling was very similar to what it was when you were on Mayaro beach in the night.
(The Year in San Fernando, p.17)

The short sentences, the boy's shifting attention, and his nostalgic comparisons with the seaside village where he has always lived contribute to the expression of bewilderment imaged in the blinding lights of the vehicles speeding out of the darkness ahead. But what is most remarkable in this passage is Anthony's gift of stealthy simile, creeping upon the reader from the "rose and fell but never died away" of confused sounds in the second sentence, through the "roaring" of the vehicles from the wide road ahead to the overwhelming noises of the town which "rose and fell like waves running up and down a beach in the night." Here, the tide turns as it were. For once having become explicit the simile shifts direction and purpose to become at the end of the passage the agent by which the new bewildering life around is absorbed in an image of past experience: "The noises rose and fell and the feeling was very similar to what it was when you were on Mayaro beach in the night." By such a complex linguistic manoeuvre and clear awareness of function does Anthony use the difference between the old and new worlds of Francis. Instead of drawing out a contrast, he unites them in the experiencing consciousness of the boy.

The boy's vision suffuses elements of experience which we are habituated to seeing as disparate or indeed as belonging to opposed categories like nostalgia-anticipation, town-country, pure-sordid. Further examples will occur later, and it will be necessary to draw some conclusions from all this. But enough has been quoted so far to suggest that Anthony is committed in The Year in San Fernando to

involving us in the feel of a peculiarly open state of consciousness; that this is achieved by a scrupulous adherence to the boy's point of view in a deceptively easy style that carries the necessary sensuous burden as well as sustaining the illusion of adolescent reportage. The kind of participation invited in this way seems to me to be of a more experimental kind than that which V. S. Naipaul suggests may be achieved in another way: "A literature can grow only out of a strong framework of social convention. And the only convention the West Indian knows is his involvement with the white world. This deprives his world of universal appeal. The situation is too special. The reader is excluded; he is invited to witness and not to participate. It is easier to enter any strong framework of social convention, however alien. It is easier to enter the tribal world of an African writer like Camara Laye."[21] The reader's sensuous involvement in Anthony's fiction will be illustrated in fuether quotations below but there is another element not restricted to the question of involvement to be traced in Naipaul's remark. The West Indian hankering after something like a tribal past or coherent social present as an organising principle for fiction, only latent in Naipaul's comment, appears more distinctly in Bim of July-December 1963 where praise for A House for Mr. Biswas is followed by this conclusion: "The Negro West Indian cannot really expect novels like Biswas until he has a strong enough framework of social convention from which to operate and until his won technique is flexible and subtle enough to take advantage of it." Novels do indeed reflect the society out of which they have been created but coherence in the world of the novel is one thing and an external framework of social convention is another. It does little good to confuse life with fiction at this level to the extent of implying that you cannot write a well-organised novel if you do not live in a well-organised society.

---

[21] The Middle Passage (1962), p.70.

The boy's experiencing consicousness is both the means of securing the reader's involvement and of giving unity to the world of the novel, but I want to look at some other features that are used to suggest a framework of convention within which the boy's way of feeling and seeing operates. In the first place, there is a nearly classical observance of the unities: there is one action (what happens to the boy) one place (where the boy is) one time (the year) and one agent (the active and passive boy). Next, Francis' physical world is clearly defined in terms of a house (the Chandles house), places at prescribed distances from the house (the market, the wharf) and objects and persons (the girl Julia and Mt. Naparaima) seen on journeys to and from the house. Within this physically framed world, Francis' behaviour is regulated by a number of routine or repetitive activities which serve as conventions in the social world of the novel: going to market, sweeping the house, watering the plants and rubbing Mrs. Chandles' legs with Sacrool 'The Indian Sacred Oil'; or looking at the growing cane and the cane fires in the distant fields, sitting still in the hideaway among the concrete pillars of the tall house listening to the sounds - passing traffic, distant music, voices upstairs - and thinking of the things and people in his life.

Since the novel covers a full year in the boy's life, Anthony is able to use a cycle of natural change and progression as a larger reference against which the novel's structural conventions are not only built up as conventions but absorbed in a more enduring pattern of growth. All the novel's repetitive activities are varied by and become increasingly integrated with the progress of the changing year. The daily round of the market changes subtly as the fruits of different seasons appear on the stalls; at the end of the dry season Mrs. Chandles' legs do not have to be rubbed and the listening boy's ears pick up the swish-swish of tyres on the wet road announcing the arrival of the rainy season. In the dry season, the cane fires are seen drawing closer and closer from the distant fields as the crop draws to an end;

and at the same time the plant watering routine is modified to twice a day and different hours to cope with the aridity and heat. These repetitive activities are registered primarily in terms of the boy's consciousness, the physical impact on him of the world he is growing into; they are not placed in the novel in a mechanical or rigidly systematic way as symbolic or thematic.

All the more remarkable then is the following extended passage. After half a year in San Fernando, Francis receives a visit from his mother. The meeting promises much, but the ingratiating behaviour of Mrs. Chandles comes between the boy and his mother, and she leaves again after having been within touching distance. As her bus speeds away, the son is conscious that his chance to escape is receding too:

> I thought of the bus speeding away and I walked slowly back to the house. The pavement along Romaine Street rose very prominently from the road and I was just slightly eased of my sadness and I stepped up onto the pavement then down to the pitch again and I walked right down the street like that. In the little spaces between the houses I could see red flickers. They were 'burning-out' - the estate people were. I stood up to watch the fire whenever I came to a little space, and I could hear the crackle and the way the flames roared in the wind. This was the last of the cane-fires, for the crop was nearly ended. Watching the fires had been a great attraction for me through all these months. They had started from far away in that great expanse of green. Now the fires were blazing out the last patch, near the town. I stood up at the big gap between the school and our house, and the fire I could see here stretched over some distance, and the flame-tongues licked the air, and they reddened a large part of the sky between the houses. Away over the brown open field I could see the dusk coming.
>
> I stood up for a while looking at the cane-fire and at the dusk but my mind was wandering and I was thinking of the speeding bus. I wondered how far was she now. I tried to think of sugar-cane. Tomorrow the cutters would come with their cutlasses, and the field, having been scorched of vermin and needless leaves, would be quickly cut down. The mills at the Usine Ste Madeleine would still be grinding, and the three chimneys would still be puffing smoke, but really, the crop would be over. Tomorrow when I got home from school I would see brown earth where the last patch of green used to be. And perhaps the ploughs would come to this little part soon. I had often seen them working in the parts already cleared. Owen, my friend, who had been to all places, said the ploughs made long mounds and furrows as they went along. He said their work was to turn up the earth and to manure it and then the whole place was left alone until planting time. I did not know about all this. I could not see the mounds from here, nor the manure which the ploughs put on. But I had seen the planting at the beginning of the year, and then what looked like endless green fields, and lately, the fires every night. And with the fires, the three chimneys of the Usine Ste Madeleine had started puffing smoke. For they were grinding the cane. When Owen explained it, it seemed very simple for him.

> But for me there was always a little mystery about the cane. I left off looking at the fires and I went home again. The thoughts of the cane had held off the feelings of dejection. Now I felt it coming like a storm.
> (The Year in San Fernando, pp. 95-96)

There is a great deal in these paragraphs: the meeting of "speeding away" and "walked slowly" at the co-ordinating conjunction which in fact turns out to be the point of separation, the structure of the sentence compelling us to enact its meaning kinetically; the way in which the boy's up and down movement between road and pavement expresses his agitation yet rhythmically soothes it; how the literal approaching dusk at the end of the first paragraph becomes the metaphorical storm of dejection in the last two sentences of the second paragraph; but there is another feature I want to notice particularly.

The fires which catch Francis' eyes and offer temporary distraction from his sense of loss are in fact signs of the end of the cane season: at the beginning of the year he had seen "what looked like endless green fields" and later, the start of the firing process, until now, the last field was being burnt out. To put it like this is to suggest the way in which the cane fields become an image of the progression of the boy's year in San Fernando; the elucidation almost inevitably makes the whole episode sound contrived but a re-reading should confirm that Anthony's art allows of our discovering the pattern without the slightest authorial urging. It is implicit in Anthony's narrative design that the reader should be aware of more at some points than Francis is: and here, the boy's depression is intensified as he turns from the cane fields while the reader who is both within and without the boy's consciousness recognises the cycle of natural regeneration within which the boy's harrowing period is absorbed. I am suggesting then, that in an apparently spontaneous way, what might so easily have been exotic information about the planting and harvesting of cane comes to serve an archetypal function in the novel. Francis, told by Owen about the ploughing and furrowing and the period of lying fallow "did not know about all this". Yet two paragraphs later when he has arrived in the

Chandles house, so subtly is Anthony's art possessed of both literalness and a transforming symbolic germ, the fires migrate and the furrowing is understood and accepted by the boy as a phase in his particular growth:

> ... My eyes looked out on Celesta Street but it was not the lit-up panes I was seeing now. Dejection swept upon me. Now at this hour I was suffering for the need of home. Now I felt a prisoner in this giddy town. My heart was burning for home. For a moment I felt like crying out, but at the moment of greatest pain my mother's voice came back to me. It was as if she was here and talking. She had said, Stay and take in education, boy. Take it in. That's the main thing.
>
> That was about the last thing she had said to me. I heard it now as plain as ever. (The Year in San Fernando, p.96)

Built-in with the structuring of the novel is a pattern of growth, but in a finite sense. When Francis first arrives in the town, with its neon signs flashing, its teeming crowds, and its tall strange buildings towering high about the streets he is more than bewildered: "Mr. Chandles had said one could get lost here so easily. Already I could see myself getting lost. I could see myself wandering hopelessly about this mazeof streets. Listening to him, without considering the words themselves, I had the feeling things would be very mixed up when I went out" (p.20). It is part of the spontaneous metaphorical design of the book that Francis' bewilderment, and his process of groping towards an understanding of the town, the Chandles house and the people who strike him as mysterious, should appear to the reader as part of a process of coming to learn about life:

> ...We were still approaching the school and I was still looking at the weird empty yard when Mr. Chandles spoke.
>
> 'You'll have to watch this school,' he said, 'This house here is yours.'
>
> The House just before the school was journey's end.
>
> (The Year in San Fernando, p.22)

This quality in the novel may be illustrated with reference to Francis' mastery of marketing skills, a finite process by which the boy can measure his own growth, but a metaphoric one through which the reader is made aware of a more open-ended journeying. Francis' initial bewilderment at the market is expressed in terms that remind us of his first responses to the town, both episodes suggesting the bewilderment of a sensitive confrontation with life:

> The vastness of this interior bewildered me, and also I was amazed by the great mass of people and by the steady roar of human voices which startled you because you saw no one screaming. The roof was all slate, half-transparent, and you could see the brightness of the sun filtering through. When there was a little room to turn round in, Brinetta looked at me and grinned. 'Well, this is the market,' she said.
> (The Year in San Fernando, p.39)

Although the boy's initial confusion steadily gives way to an increasing confidence and pride in his marketing skills, and to his becoming in a sense a member of the market community, these developments are coloured for the reader by another complication. The boy's visits to the market echo his need to belong somewhere against a background feeling (not so much recognised by as felt through the boy) for mankind's vulnerability in the fact of time. Francis had first visited the market with Brinetta, an elderly woman already passing out of the story and out of life. It is around the memory of Brinetta that the new feeling begins to form:

> The vendors knew me well by now, and they could almost tell what things I came for, and how much I wanted, and the things Mrs. Chandles liked best. It astonished me and pleased me very much that they should know this... They laughed all the time and they talked in Hindi to one another and they looked very nice in their saris and muslin veils. And mostly there would be gold plated teeth in their mouths and heavy gold bracelets on their wrists and ankles. They were very pleasant to buy from.
> When ever they spoke in English it would be to ask me about Brinetta and I would say I did not know where Brinetta was. 'Where she garn,' they would press, 'you don't know where she garn?' And when I said no, they would shake their heads and look at each other as if to say it was very strange I did not know. They had never forgotten Brinetta. (The Year in San Fernando, p.143)

And at the end of the novel when the characters are moving apart, with Mrs. Chandles dying ("she travelling home") and Francis about to get his bus back to the village, Brinetta and the market become the means by which the boy knows, yet scarcely knows that he knows, that death is part of the streaming life he is still to enter:

> Thinking of the market I remembered Brinetta and I was glad for remembering her now. For she had slipped entirely from my mind. I thought, look how Brinetta has gone away forever, and how I was leaving for good now and she wouldn't know, and she might never know Mrs. Chandles died this year.
> (The Year in San Fernando, p.186)

At the end of the novel, Francis has come to understand a certain section of San Fernando, an area of experience has been sounded. But there is no attempt on the novelist's part to suggest that the boy has now "reached maturity" or lost his innocence. What is equally evident is that the boy is unable to pass judgment on the events and people that impinged upon his consciousness during the year in San Fernando: "The bus roared on and my mind went on Mrs. Chandles, who was dying, and Mr. Chandles - so strange of late, and now homeless; and I thought also of Mrs. Princet, and I thought of Edwin and that dollar. I thought of all the mixed-up things, of all the funny things, in fact, which made the year at Romaine Street" (pp. 189-190). But if I have been arguing so far in terms that might suggest the superiority of the reader's vision to that of Francis, I want to modify that impression radically.

It was suggested earlier that in The Year in San Fernando Anthony is committed to involving us in the feel of a peculiarly open state of consciousness. The consciousness is open in several senses. In the first place it is a fluid condition in which different times, different events and different places co-exist. This is implicit in the structure of the novel (one time, one action - what the boy endures - and one place - where the boy is) and it expresses itself again and again in the boy's capacity for simultaneous recall and experience. It is the source of the spontaneous metaphorical activity in the novel. Examples of this have already been seen and will occur later in this discussion. But one small instance in which a curious resonance is suggested may be looked at here. During the dry season, much of Francis' time is spent watering the dried-up plants. When, late in the novel, Mr. Chandles is kind to the boy, we read: "Joy had flowed like water through me and filled me up" (p.141). It is worth insisting that while the correspondence between Francis' arid life and that of the plants strikes us forcibly at this point, and spreads backwards to invest the watering activity with a wishful mirroring function, there is no sign at all of a mechanical author pushing a symbol.

The boy's consciousness is further open in the sense that it is void of conventional association between object, experience or person and attribute:

> ...Mrs. Chandles thought I was smiling with her. She looked strangely pleased. Her smile had big pleats on the cheeks and under the chin and the flabby skin round her eyes were now a thousand tiny folds. Her gums showed pink and I could see the sockets and her eyes shone out like two jumble-beads. It was strange because she looked spooky somehow, and yet she looked so sincere, I believed in her. We smiled broadly. (The Year in San Fernando, p.98)

These two senses of 'open' have to be seen in relation to the third: the open consciousness responds to each experience in an immediate, excitable way. This extreme susceptibility leads the boy away from judgement into conflicting responses to the same thing or person from situation to situation but its most prominent mark on the novel is in the number of occasions when Francis experiences shock. The structure of the novel lends itself to this recurrent aspect of the boy's behaviour. What goes on away from the house is outside the boy's consciousness but those who are involved in these actions (notably Mr. Chandles) are in periodic contact with Francis. For this reason in the novel, Mr. Chandles' return from Mayaro at mid-day on Saturday is a source of dread to the boy; his departure, listened for, brings great release: "From where I was I could hear him brushing his teeth very forcibly, and I could hear the tap water running and being sucked down the drain. Then the water stopped running and I did not hear him for a little while. Then came his footsteps, and when the front door opened and shut again, my heart was pounding. The next moment the gate slammed. I was wildly glad" (p.57). On one occasion Anthony uses Francis' unusually long absence from the house to great effect. The boy returns from his stolen visit to the sea to a terrific row between Mrs. Chandles and her son about Marva, the woman in Mayaro. Francis disturbs his routine and keeps busy unnecessarily watering the plants on the veranda until the smell of the flowers makes him think about Julia:

> I stopped a little and laughed at my silly thinking and then I jumped because the front door was pushed open. Then I heard Mr. Chandles in the veranda.

His footsteps were sounding double, and when he came to the steps I straightened up and stood on the side, allowing him to pass. And then, turning round with the can, my heart gave a violent thump. Mr. Chandles and Marva were going out through the gate. (The Year in San Fernando, p.138)

In so far as Anthony is able to involve us in the feel of a consciousness open in the senses described, we are made to live in a world emptied of complacent existence so that we grope with Francis towards a 'meaning' for his experiences. It is also part of the novel's technique that the reader should be able to 'recognise' some of these experiences over Francis' head. But Anthony is not interested in an ironic contrast between innocent vision and experienced interpretation. The story itself is a sordid one - a protracted squabble for the house between Mrs. Chandles and Mr. Chandles who wishes to take it away from his brother Edwin; a double love affair being conducted by Mr. Chandles with Marva the girl in the Mayaro and Julia the girl in San Fernando; and the callous treatment of the little boy in the Chandles' household. How little Anthony is concerned with a moral judgement or indignant protest or other forms of opposition may be illustrated by the boy's changing perspectives on Mrs. Chandles.

He first hears of her as "old and lonely" and wanting someone to stay with her (p.10); his first experience of her is as a remote voice (p.23) and when he first sees her she is aloof and somehwat frightening: "Mrs. Chandles has stood up for a moment as if inspecting me. She was very old and wrinkled and small. The next moment she hobbled away through the door through which Mr. Chandles had gone" (p.24). As the novel progresses Mrs. Chandles emerges as demanding, cunning and nasty. After a row with Mr. Chandles she locks herself in for the day and leaves Francis stranded (... I wondered to myself what sort of human being this old lady could be. She hadn't cooked. She couldn't expect that I had eaten. She had left me to starve and like Mr. Chandles she did not care a damn" (p.69). Yet Francis tries to please her and when Mrs. Princet arrives to visit her girlhood friend, Francis enjoys Mrs. Chandles good humour as if her previous manner did not matter; "My heart was

light and as open as the skies in a way I had hardly known it before. This was an Easter Day beautiful in itself and beautiful because of Mrs. Princet, and because of the strange kindness of Mrs. Chandles. I thought I should never forget it" (p.77). Later, when the rains come Francis feels himself bound to an extraordinarily winning Mrs. Chandles (pp. 111-128) who is now like a relative. When Mrs. Chandles becomes ill and is dying the boy neither sentimentalises her nor is vindictively joyful at her imminent death but becomes the agent of the novel's compassion. The open consciousness of the boy allows him each time to make an appropriate response to the Mrs. Chandles of the moment.

Putting this as a statement about character in novels, we might say that The Year in San Fernando continuously leads us away from a settlednotion of the person to a more liberal view of latent and only sporadically realised possibilities. As on the level of character, so with respect to object and event: one of the effects of Anthony's narrative technique in The Year in San Fernando is to promote a vision for the reader in which each 'known' factor in experience is restored to a more primordial condition of latency.

It is here I think that the astonishing originality of The Year in San Fernando lies. The image of Francis, deprived, and tethered to the Chandles house (even to having a lair below the house) in a circumscribed world of which he is trying to make sense is an image of the condition of the modern West Indian. But out of this distress Anthony has created an archetypal situation. On the one hand, there is the pattern of growth and natural progression suggested by the spontaneous metaphorical activity of the novel's language. On the other, there is the narrator's extreme openness to the possibilities of experience, marked by Francis' capacity for shock. Through the boy's consciousness Anthony induces us to make the confession of weakness, of un-knowing, by which an unstable world is transformed into the flux of re-creation:

I remembered walking through the short-cut in the heat of the dry season when the tall trees among the houses had been stricken and barren-looking and had not caught my eye at all. I remembered seeing the mango - so sensitive to heat - and their leaves had been shrivelled up and their barks peeled, as if they had surrendered and could take no more. I remembered the cedar, too, one of the giant cedars, and I had even looked at it and thought how much firewood there was here. But all those trees had sprung to life again, with the rains, and were so rich in leaf now it was unbelievable. But I had seen this myself. And now I watched the great cedars sending even more branches into the sky of the town.

(The Year in San Fernando, p.147)

(iii) Terrified Consciousness

The publication in 1966 of Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea not only signals the brilliant reappearance after twenty-seven years of an extraordinary author; in West Indian writing it directs attention to at least three other novels by writers who were born or who grew up in the islands.[22] All four writers belong to a minority group called White West Indians. "The English of these islands are melting away", wrote Froude. "Every year the census renews its warning. The rate may vary; sometimes for a year or two there may seem to be a pause in the movement, but it begins again and is always in the same direction. The white is relatively disappearing, the black is growing; this is the fact with which we have to deal."[23] Emancipation revealed the failure of the planter class in the West Indies and hastened their financial ruin. But it also meant, as Froude foresaw (although it took much longer to come than he feared) Black majority rule: "Were it worthwhile, one might draw a picture of the position of an English governor, with a black parliament and a black ministry... No Englishman, not even a bankrupt peer, would consent to occupy such a position..."[24]

---

[22] P. Shand Allfrey The Orchid House (1953); Geoffrey Drayton Christopher (1959) and J. B. Emtage Brown Sugar (1966).

[23] James Anthony Froude The English in the West Indies (1887) pp. 284-285.

[24] Froude, p.285.

Brown Sugar written in the 1960's by a West Indian of the old planter type expresses in the form of mainly political lampoon the extremist white reaction to the kind of situation pictured by Froude. Hoggy Cumberbatch, rum shope owner and a killer of pigs, floats to a Ministerial seat on his debtors' votes. When the fictional island's first all-coloured government collapses through incompetence and corruption, Hoggy uses his gains to buy a derelict estate and set up a ganja producing settlement, becoming in the process, Gangunga Maraj otherwise known as Gong, temporal and spiritual head of the Rasta brethern: "Cumberbatch ruled this little kingdom despotically. He lived in the great house in parish splendour, and the pick of the Men of Dreadlocks become his bodyguard, quartered in the decayed estate buildings about it. He swelled in stature, an awesome father figure, and a crude court etiquette developed. Suppliants had to approach him crawling on hands and knees across the cracked floor of his chamber (big enough to hold a ball in) sprinkle dust on their heads and in the end crawl backwards again the way they had come" (p.22). Emtage's irritated awareness that the new colonial politicians have arisen out of the ruins of the estates and great houses prevents him from developing Cumberbatch with the artistic detachment with which Naipaul handles Ganesh Ramsumair in The Mystic Masseur; and the white West Indian's reactionary political stance interferes too often, either in authorial comment (see the first three paragraphs of chapter 3) or in the reflections of authorially approved characters (see p.35 from "Dr. Humphrey Pierce..." to p.37 "... of a foreign field") to allow Brown Sugar to be a valid satire on the contemporary West Indian situation.

After fashioning the blistering disillusionment of an English liberal come out to the colony to sumpathise with the Rastas, Emtage pursues Hoggy, the stereotype of the blubbering superstitious Negro, now on the run, to death by heart failure in a haunted cave.

Within this impurely motivated and extraneously determined narrative Emtage's exotic intentions announced in the novel's title are furthered by the precocity of an eleven year old half-caste Martini (also called Brown Sugar) whose attempts to seduce the young White man Dillon are decorated by quotations from the poets, and Jean Paul Sartre and by her determination to prove that although she does not have pubic hair she has at least pubic fluff. Whatever possibilities the character may have held for the development of the novel, however, are sacrificed to Emtage's lampooning intention: after saving the liberal whom the Rastas have set alight, Brown Sugar dies of her injuries. An 'Epilogue from the Press Box' shows the liberals in England bending over backwards to 'understand' the goings-on, and Mr. Pooley, now experienced, begins to doubt whether the races are equal.

Although, as in much of chapter 4 - significantly a cricket chapter - Emtage's touch can be light and the manner that of an engaging raconteur, it is to Froude that we might turn for a suitable epigraph to Brown Sugar: "/T/heir education, such as it may be, is but skin deep, and the old African superstitions lie undisturbed at the bottom of their souls. Give them independence, and in a few generations they will peel off such civilisation as they have learnt as easily and as willingly as their coats and trousers."[25]

Emtage himself has retreated to England to avoid the wind of change. Of the remaining three White West Indian authors, Geoffrey Drayton has emigrated like other West Indian writers; Phyllis Shand Allfrey was a minister in the ill-fated West Indian federation; and Jean Rhys left her native island of Dominica at the age of sixteen, spending the years of the First World War in England, the between Wars period on the Continent, then disppearing till 1958 when she was traced to an address in Cornwall. There are differences in narrative technique and in themes between The Orchid House, Christopher and Wide Sargasso Sea; and while the first two are set in the twentieth century, Jean Rhys' work is located in the immediate post-

---

[25]Froude p. 287.

Emancipation period. But, with differing degrees of intensity the three novels reflect on experience of distress or shock which may be traced to the process of decolonisation that began with the ending of Negro slavery as such:

> ...[D]ecolonisation is always a violent phenomenon... Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonised. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and the compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonised. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another 'species' of men and women: the colonisers.[26]

Taking a cue from Fanon we might use the phrase "terrified consciousness" to suggest the sensations of the white minority as a massive and smouldering Black population is released into an awareness of its power. It is possible to see Brown Sugar as a side effect but the three novels to be discussed give imaginative resonance to the phrase 'terrified consciousness' which comes to its climax of art and intensity in Wide Sargasso Sea. It would be foolish to give the impression that The Orchid House and Christopher are interesting only as a background to Jean Rhys' outstanding fiction: in what follows, indeed, I shall try to suggest the essential qualities of each of these neglected works. At the same time, there are remarkable elements of continuity between them: attitudes of the white characters to landscape and to the other side represented by the Negro masses; the figures of long-serving Negro nurses and of obeah-women; the occurrence of dreams, nightmares and other heightened states of consciousness; and references to an outer socio-economic situation that is recognisable as the fall of the planter class. These elements of continuity arise not from the authors' knowledge of one another or one another's work but involuntarily from the natural stance of the White West Indian writers. To follow the common elements across the three novels is to sharpen our awareness both of their artistic differences and of their cumulative significance as part of the West Indian experience.

---

[26]Frantz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth (MacGibbon and Kee, 1965) p. 29. My italics.

The Orchid House is narrated in the first person by one of the characters, Lally the long-serving Negro nurse of a White family in a fictional island modelled upon the actual island of Dominica. By using the nurse in this way, Mrs. Allfrey is able to recall the past of the family through the witness of the novel's present action. For it is part of the author's purpose to show the decline of the class represented by the planter family and the emergence of the new economic forces and rulers in the island. Although Mrs. Allfrey uses the experience of the first World War as the immediate cause of the Master's state of shock and sustaining dope addiction, Lally is made to recall the Old Master's brief visit and hurried retreat at the time of the Master's return: "In my view he wasn't just hurrying to the sick-beds but hastening to get back to his orchid house at L'Aromatique, for that was where he spent his rest time pottering. He would stand there under that roof of palms plaited with bamboos, unhanging wire baskets to dip his plants into a tank swarming with tiny fish: the fish were there to eat mosquito grubs. Very often he got paid for his attention with rare flowering things; the poor patients knew his hobby. He would scoop out bits of log and fill the hollows with charcoal, then bind these queer roots with coconut fibre. Hours and hours he would spend there ..." (p. 42). The sense of withdrawal is further conveyed by the figure of Andrew, a close friend of the Master's three daughters, dying of consumption and without the will to be cured, feeding on the past at a place symbolically called Petit Cul-de-Sac. The malaise in the novel spreads over three generations. When the three sisters, Stella, Joan and Natalie return after many years to visit their parents and their native land, two further elements in White West Indian enclave life become apparent. At L'Aromatique which the Master and the Madam now possess (secured from them by Natalie's money) a strange entente has been established between the now elderly virgin Mamselle Bosquet and the Madam, both of whom love and are ministering to the Master; and as the three sisters visit Andrew at Petit Cul-de-Sac, it appears that

each of them is in love with Andrew and he with them: his concubinage with their coloured cousin Cornelie is merely a surrender to the times. To the atmosphere of the hot-house we must add sexual inbreeding (a feature which also appears in Christopher where the boy's aunt turns out to be in love with her sister's husband).

Just as the Master on his return expresses his sensuous feel for the native landas a cool sombre retreat ("The tree trunks were like white pillars; a cathedrel in mourning. Arches of dark green leaves throwing shadows...and the dried nutmeg kernals dropping softly..." p.43), so each of the sisters nostalgically indulges in the sounds and sights of a clinging land: "In Stella's sick dream of home the island had been a vision so exquisite that she was now almost afraid to open her eyes wide, lest she might be undeceived and cast down, or lest confirmation would stab through her like a shock. Treading the black damp earth of the bridle-path, brushed by ferns and wild begonias, experiencing the fleet glimpse of a ramier flying from the forest floor through the branches into the Prussion blue sky, it was impossible not to look and look and drink it in like one who had long been thirsty. It is more beautiful than a dream, for in dreams you cannot smell this divine spiciness, you can't stand in a mist of aromatic warmth and stare through jungle twigs to a spread of distant town, so distant that people seem to have no significance; you cannot drown your eyes in a cobalt sea, a sea with the blinding gold of the sun for a boundary!" (p.64, novelist's italics). But if the sensuously felt land is a function of the characters' nostalgia (and incidentally that of the author), nostalgia is only one component of the authorial view made explicit at another point: "Beauty and disease, beauty and sickness, beauty and horror: that was the island. A quartering breeze hurried eastward, over cotton clouds; the air was soft and hot; colour drenched everything, liquid turquoise melted into sapphire and then into emerald" (p.75).

It is a weakness of The Orchid House that Mrs. Allfrey's language is not equal to the sensuous task she sets it: there are too many laboured passages of passionate

declaration and too few by which we are dramatically involved. Nevertheless, the "beauty and sickness" view of the island is the source of the novel's social committment and of the development of Joan as a character breaking out of the orchid house existence to become politically involved.

For while the novel expresses and places the hot-house life of the distressed White minority it satirises the power complex of Church and business in the island of Dominica. This side of The Orchid House differentiates it markedly from both Christopher and Wide Sargasso Sea and it determines the White character's view of the Black population. Reflecting on her period of service with the family, Lally who is the embodiment of the traditionally devoted Negro servant (noticed by historians such as Edward Long even during slavery) contrasts her past with her present outlook: "When I was nurse to the little girls, I had no time to fall ill or to see how beautiful everything was. And anyhow, when you are working for white people whom you love, you can only think of those people and their wants, you hardly notice anything else. I did not even pay any attention to my own people, the black people, in those days, but now I am observing them and seeing what is happening to them. I am seeing how poor they are, and how the little babies have stomachs swollen with arrowroot and arms and legs spotted with disease" (p.9). An awareness of the deprivation of the Black masses is used to create a sense of menace and persecution in Wide Sargasso Sea, and it is used as a shock experience in Christopher when the boy is confronted by a desperate beggar (pp. 60-62). The more politically conscious author of The Orchid House brings the two sides together in a political alliance between Joan, a liberal committed to the people, and Baptiste the trades union organising son of the family's cook. Mrs. Allfrey allows Lally to ridicule Joan for her abstract conception of the people, and Joan's and Baptiste's first meeting with "those vagabonds" ends with some looting of the livestock at L'Aromatique, but it is obvious at the end that Joan's stance is an authorially approved one. The

Master dies on the air journey to a foreign hospital; Andrew, on the same flight, is heading for a sanitorium in Canada; Stella who has murdered the drug peddlar Mr. Lilipoulala hovers in New York, disaffected from her husband; Natalie continues to parade her self-protecting cynicism; the Madam and Mamselle Bosquet are left desolate; Lally turns to the holy book; but Joan, blackmailed by the Church into refraining from political activity herself, prepares for the arrival of her husband who will take her place in the front line of the struggle beside Baptiste.

The way in which Mrs. Allfrey combines her dirge for a decadent past with the hope in a political future in the bewitching land may be illustrated by the episode in which the ailing Andrew comes to visit Joan. The meeting takes place in the symbolic orchid house where Andrew's wish to smother himself against Joan's breasts is seen as an escapist impulse and is contrasted with Joan's desire to make him look out of the window and breathe freely. When Andrew challenges Joan with not caring for him the reply suggests the broader sympathy of the committed character. The whole episode is witnessed by the eavesdropping nurse:

> 'You are a poor spoilt boy,' Miss Joan said, with a sigh.
> 'A dying man', he said. 'And if you were Stella, you would cry out in protest, "Live for me!" But you don't care.'
> 'I care, but differently,' she said. I could hear the tears springing up in her throat. Some came into my own foolish old eyes then. When I wiped them away I myself gazed outwards at the scene around me, trying to see what there was in this common everyday outlook of mountains and blueness which filled my girls with passionate admiration. All I could see was a riot of gold and purple and crimson (Madam's flowering bushes) and the two huge mango trees, the shining silver from against a damp wall, and the purple shadows on far hills. Nothing unusual, except to those who had lived like exiles in grey shadows. (The Orchid House, p.170)

The scene ends with the arrival of the priest Brother Peregrine who tears Andrew away from the girl and announces the interest of Father Toussaint in Joan's and Baptiste's political activities.

If Mrs. Allfrey's awareness of the exploitation of the people by the new merchant class and their allies the Church provides her white character with an antagonist and a possibility of belonging to the society, Geoffrey Drayton turns the

same social situation inwards. Although Christopher develops from a situation "after the war, when all the planters went poor - and the merchants rich" (p.48), Drayton does not satirise the new class. Instead the novel builds upon both the resentment of Ralph Stevens at his ruined finances and the sense of the new class that their family is not as good as the Stevens family which was established in the island during the days of slavery. Jean Rhys uses this same conflict to intensify the alienation of Antoinette, and the conflicting moods of the hate-love relationship that exists between her and her newly-arrived husband. Drayton however places the conflict in the background as a source of the estrangement between Ralph Stevens and Mrs. Stevens. The novel concentrates on the consequences of this estrangement in an already isolated household, upon a particularly sensitive boy.

Christopher is narrated in the third person by an omniscient author but narrated from a point of view that is the boy's. Christopher lives in the isolated Great House of his unsuccessful father, and we are made to look in upon the boy's thoughts and feelings as he prowls silently about the grounds, extracting lonely pleasures from his observation of plants and trees and insects, birds and fish: "He played God to them: it was night when his shadow fell across the pool and day when he leant away again. The insignificant fish, sand-coloured and black, easily camouflaged themselves. He did not care about them. But there were others, angel fish with yellow moons about them and spotted porgies." (p.129). Throughout the novel, Drayton conveys an impression of loneliness sensitivity and suppressed vitality. Both Mrs. Allfrey and Jean Rhys, too, use the child's consciousness in their respective novels, Jean Rhys to brilliant effect. The early pages of Wide Sargasso Sea are narrated by the child Antoinette who witnesses the growing hysteria of her isolated mother, the tension that builds up between the mother and her second husband the Englishman Mason, and the haunting picture of a Negro rising: "They all looked the same, it was the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming,

mouth half open to shout" (p.42). Every one of Antoinette's childhood experiences is designed to intensify her insecurity, alienation and unhappiness, as the background for her later vulnerability and madness. With the Great House ablaze and her family about to take to flight, Antoinette sees her friend Tia. Jean Rhys uses the incident between the two girls to insinuate by a mirror image, Antoinette's identification with her island life and to suggest in the outcome of their confrontation, the recoiling forces sweeping across the lives of the individual characters:

> Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed by the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (Wide Sargasso Sea, p.45)

But while a distressed childhood is the background for an even more shattering experience later in Wide Sargasso Sea, the troubled consciousness of Christopher is the substance of the whole of Drayton's novel, and the condition is framed within an ameliorating design.

In this last respect Christopher resembles The Orchid House more closely. Drayton's story of a boy's growth in awareness is also on account of a White boy's growing involvement with and understanding of his Black countrymen. At first, the Negroes and the Negro drumming and singing from the village are part of Christopher's nightmares: "In the sudden silence between hymns he grew limp and cold. The shadows fell away from his bed and stood in shapeless waiting; then gathered again as he tensed once more with the drums. At some point, if he were not still as death, they would close right in upon him, and at their touch he would shrivel into nothingness" (p.29). And when Christopher is taken into his parents' bed "he lay close to his mother and did not look up, because staring over the bottom rail of

the bed were black faces with wide eyes and mouths that grinned" (p.31). Christopher's initial sense of the menace and the mystery of his countrymen is contained in his attitude to obeah. But his growing up and his increasing familiarity with the Negro world around him are shown by his changing attitudes to obeah: the boy moves in the novel from ignorance to mystification to childish involvement and finally to understanding in psychological terms of how obeah operates. The same logical view of obeah, this time of obeah as a knowledge of herbs and poisons, appears in The Orchid House, but not in Wide Sargasso Sea where Jean Rhys presents Antoinette's visit to the obeah-woman as a desperate measure by the character who has been abandoned by her husband-lover, and where consequently the author's personal belief or disbelief in obeah is totally irrelevant to the fictional situation.

The figure of the Negro nurse, crucial in The Orchid House and in Wide Sargasso Sea where she is also the obeah woman, is central in Christopher too: Christopher's alienation from his parents and their world, andhis closer involvement with the Negro majority are both implicit in the role of the nurse Gip as virtual mother to the boy. In Christopher too the author turns a sensuously felt landscape to dramatic account, using the natural scene both to afford Christopher relief and to reflect his lonely hot-house existence. A good illustration of this is thewalk in the orchid house at his grand-father's residence which also reminds us of Mrs. Allfrey's novel: "In beds around a small goldfish pool were more varieties of terrestrial orchid than he had ever imagined existed. Pink, purple, and bright orange, they exploded at eye-level into shapes as strange as fireworks on Guy Fawkes's day. But the orchids that hung from the roof in wire baskets, or clung to cradles of charcoal and coconut fibre, were even more startling. Some were long sepals that drooped below their chins like Chinamen's moustaches. Others had eyes on tall stilts and grimaced with protruding tongues" (p.177). Further, the landscape appears in Christopher's terrifying nightmares (see pp. 186-188) and in his day-time delirium as on the visit to

his aunt's house near the sea, when the beauty of sea, sea-shells and brilliant sunshine melt into a horrified vision of waves of heat "flowing over and rippling the shapes of things", producing "red horsemen riding black horses" under whose hoofs "deep shadow spun in giddy circles" as they reach to trample him down (see pp. 40-41).

Different as are the uses to which Mrs. Allfrey and Geoffrey Drayton put the elements so far described, both writers produce fictions in which there is a suggestion of amelioration. In Wide Sargasso Sea we are involved in terrified consciousness without relief. The novel is set in the 1830's, like H. G. de Lisser's sensational The White Witch of Rosehall but Miss Rhys is interested neither in popular romance and exotica nor historical documentation. The novel has neither the political drive of The Orchid House nor the concern for rapprochement in the society that may be noticed in Christopher: the Emancipation Act is seen as the root of insecurity and the cause of despair. In a scene of throwaway voilence the torpid narrator records the death of a ruined planter: "One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property - Nelson's Rest it was called - and strangers from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy" (p.17). The new speculators in the islands are seen as alien invaders out of sympathy with and totally ignorant of people and place. Mr. Mason miscalculates the danger in the Negro mass, and Antoinette's husband on the way to the "sweet honeymoon house" finds the place oppressive: "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger." (p.70). The smouldering Negroes become a nightmare avenging force: "...We could not move far they pressed too close round us. Some of them were laughing and waving sticks, some of the ones at the back were carrying flambeaux and it was light as day. Aunt Cora held my hand very tightly and her lips moved but I could not hear because of the noise. And I was afraid, because I knew that the ones

who laughed would be the worst. I shut my eyes and waited" (p.42). Caught between these hostile bodies are the Creoles, beseiged underdogs. But the novel is not ultimately concerned with anything as broad as the alienation of a class: "They say when trouble comes close ranks and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (p.17). The other Whites become for the Cosways a whispering, gossiping force, telling lies. In The Orchid House, the Madam's increasing apathy, and in Christopher Mrs. Stevens' constriction and sense of being at bay, both suggest possibilities of the female characters as suffering vulnerable agents, but it is in Wide Sargasso Sea that these possibilities are developed to their limits. Through the singular narrating consciousness of Antoinette Cosway, as girl and as married woman, Jean Rhys creates a pattern of alienation within alienation, distress multiplied upon distress as first mother and then, with more intense focus in the novel, daughter, are pushed towards inevitable madness:

> It was too hot that afternoon. I could see the beads of perspiration on her upper lip and the dark circles under eyes. I started to fan her, but she turned her head away. She might rest if I left her alone, she said.
> Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa - once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe. But not any longer. Not any more. (Wide Sargasso Sea, p.22)

Although it is much more 'historical' than The Orchid House or Christopher, Wide Sargasso Sea creates out of its raw material an experience that we think of as essentially modern. In Part I, Jean Rhys uses the historical situation as a credible determinant of Antoinette's alienation expressed in terms of self-mutilation and a desire for anihilation:

> I took another road, past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years. I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people". Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin - once I saw a snake. All better than people.
> Better. Better, better than people.
> Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer. (Wide Sargasso Sea, p.28)

Antoinette's alienation is further expressed in terms of her recoil from a lush absorbent landscape suddenly gone rank and threatening:

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible - the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered, then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it.
> (Wide Sargasso Sea, p.19)

Jean Rhys uses terms similar to both Mrs. Allfrey's and Christopher Drayton's, but as we shall see the drugging landscape is used in a more chemical manner in Wide Sargasso Sea than in the other two novels. Antoinette's sense of being menaced is literally established in relation to the rising Black population and rendered again and again in tactile detail: "Then the girl grinned and began to crack the knuckles of her fingers. At each crack I jumped and my hands began to sweat. I was holding some school books in my right hand and I shifted them to under my arm, but it was too late, there was a mark on the palm of my hand and a stain on the cover of the book. The girl began to laugh, very quietly..." (p.49). But from this sense of specific menace Jean Rhys develops the female character's feeling towards a more archetypal sense of pursuit in which there is a hint of perverse enjoyment of or resignation to the hateful experience:

> ...I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet' he says and I follow him weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress.
> (Wide Sargasso Sea, pp. 59-60)

Antoinette, like Christopher, has nightmares but Jean Rhys uses nightmare to point the novel towards the complex love-hate situation that is the baffling substance of Part Two. In this section of the novel, both the desire for anihilation, and the

drugging landscape, become part of a sexual relationship that seems to open up a retreat from a distressing fate.

Having established Antoinette's desolation and need of protective love in the first part of the novel, Miss Rhys proceeds to marry her in the next movement to the embittered younger son of an English gentleman: "I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain? The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet..." (p.70). Once again it is obvious that the novelist is building upon a type situation in island history - the marrying of Creole heiresses for their dowry by indigent younger sons - but this situation is used only as the credible background 'explanation' of the twistings and turnings of love that it is the fiction's concern to explore: "I'd remember her effort to escape. (No, I am sorry, I do not wish to marry you). Had she given way to that man Richard's arguments, threats probably, I wouldn't trust him far, or to my half-serious blandishments and promises? In any case she had given way but coldly, unwillingly, trying to protect herself with silence and a blank face" (p.91).

In this section of the novel Miss Rhys uses the idea of withdrawal by wounded characters (latent in Andrew's retreat to Petit Cul-de-Sac in The Orchid House) and the sensuous correspondent land to produce a number of cumulatively impressive effects. On the simplest level, we and the husband (with whose narration Part Two opens) are made to see Antoinette's "blank face" and protective mask giving way to enigmatic animation as they move further and further away from the scenes of her distress on the long journey through virgin land to the cool remote estate in the hills. Ironically, the journey is an enactment of Antoinette's nightmare, and the place becomes desecrated. "...I loved this place and you have made it into a place of hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this,

and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else where I have been unhappy, and all the other things are nothing to what has happened here. I hate it now like I hate you and before I die I will show you how much I hate you" (p.147).

But it is as much an expression of Miss Rhys' understanding as of her compassion that she is able to reveal the hard young man's bitterness and cruelty and yet suggest the depths of his own longing. This is done in relation to the land. At first it is menacing ("Those hills would close in on you" p.69) then it is "too much", then sensuously overpowering, then charged with "a music I had never heard before," sounding intimations of a wished for unknown: "It was a beautiful place - wild, untouched above all untouched, with an alien disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking 'What I see is nothing. I want what it hides - that is not nothing" (p.87). By allowing the husband to identify Antoinette with the secret land, Miss Rhys invests the human relationship with supreme possibilities. In "the sweet honeymoon house" a drugging sexuality (associated with the overpowering scents of the land) is the means by which each of the broken characters is able to abandon defensive postures temporarily: "If I have forgotten caution, she has forgotten silence and coldness" (p.91). But it is part of the rigorousness with which Miss Rhys explores the terrified consciousness, and her fidelity to the facts of her fictional world that the young man's extreme self-consciousness and his susceptibility to intrusions from the day to day world should frustrate his yearning to possess and be possessed. It is after a long period of vacillation (pp.162-173) in which the author's ability to convey the buffeting feel of conflicting emotions is given free play that the husband's easing decision to hate is taken finally. Antoinette's face becomes blank again "the doll's smile came back - nailed to her face. Even if she had wept like Magdalene it would have made no difference. I was exhausted. All the mad conflicting emotions had gone and left me wearied and empty. Sane" (p.172). The new hate is directed against both land and woman:

> I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it.
> (Wide Sargasso Sea, p.172)

Since for Antoinette too the land becomes a hated place to correspond with her unhappiness and her hate for her husband, it is possible to see that the author is less interested in making statements about the place itself (however sensuously evoked) than in using it as a subjective landscape upon which the impersonal and obscure forces at work in the characters of love may be projected (by them psychologically, and by the author rhetorically).

From Christophine the nurse's point of view, and also the point of view of an obeah woman (so subtly does Miss Rhys use the elements that we have seen in the novels discussed earlier) the husband has bewitched the vulnerable Antoinette "...You make love to her till she drunk with it, no rum could make her drunk like that, till she can't do without it. It's she can't see the sun any more. Only you she see" (p.153). Although this is true, and Antoinette is made desparate by the withdrawal of her husband's furious love, he too is revealed as a frustrated being. It seems to me that in "the sweet honeymoon house" episodes Miss Rhys is driven to posit the value even of an anihilating and protective love in a distressful world; and with equal emphasis, the promise of a visionary love demanding surrender of our conventional premises in an increasingly materialistic world. The placing of these only fleetingly realised possibilities within the characters' reach intensifies the pattern of deprivation, insecurity and longing Miss Rhys discovers in our time and in the historical period in which the novel is set. The kind of transference or concurrency achieved in this way is reflected on the level of person when Antoinette's resentful firing of her tyrannical husband's house is made to parallel the Negro burning of the Great House which had lodged in her childhood memory. In Wide Sargasso Sea, the terrified consciousness of the historical White West Indian is revealed to be a universal heritage.

PRECURSORS

It has been suggested in earlier chapters that H. G. de Lisser (1878-1944) is the prototype of the West Indian writer who has little to express but plenty of sociological and historical raw material for documentary purposes. And it has been argued that the art of Tom Redcam (1870-1933) was not equal to his energetic efforts at the beginning of this century to launch in The All Jamaica Library a literature "dealing directly with Jamaica and Jamaicans and written by Jamaicans". Nevertheless, de Lisser and Redcam were precursors in other senses than the simple chronological one. Although neither used dialect for other purposes than vulgar realism and for sketches of the comic Negro, their inwardness with the folk speech and the zest with which they introduced it in their fictions mark them off from users of the lame Negro English of British convention and place them at the beginnings of an inventive use of dialect (whose increasing stylistic flexibility and enriching contextualisations have been illustrated in Chapter IV).

Redcam and de Lisser are precursors in another way. If the dilemmas Redcam poses for his fictional heroines, and his attitudes to them anticipate developments in the work of Claude McKay (especially Banana Bottom 1933) and George Lamming (especially Season of Adventure 1960) de Lisser's Jane's Career is the first novel by a West Indian to be handled by a British publisher and the first in which the Black character is at the novel's centre.

It is to be noted that Redcam and de Lisser in no way constituted a school or a partnership. More closely related in this manner were the Trinidadians Alfred Mendes (1897-) and C. L. R. James (1901-) who were at the centre of literary activity in Trinidad in the late 1920's and early 1930's. The tradition of social realism and compassionate protest in which they worked is a persistent feature of West Indian

writing; and it has been argued earlier that Mendes' first novel, Pitch Lake (1934) which expresses the deracination of a Portuguese youth, in revulsion against the gross shop-keeping world of his father and ill at ease in the second generation world of rich and urban Portuguese into which he breaks is a staggering intimation of the more polished A House for Mr. Biswas (1961).

Another group of precursors may be made up from among the large numbers of West Indians who emigrated to the United States in the Harlem era and before the immigration laws of the 1920's. It is difficult to assess the number of emigrants since there was such rapid absorbtion in American Negro life. It is just as difficult to work out who are the lost West Indian writers. In the bibliography to The Negro Novel in America (revised edition, 1965) Robert Bone writes:

> The problem of national origin arises chiefly in regard to West Indian authors. On the grounds of national consciousness I have excluded Eric Rasmussen, who was born in the Virgin Islands, who has lived sporadically in New York, but who writes of Caribbean life in The First Night (1951). For similar reasons I have excluded R. Archer Tracy, who was born in the British West Indies, who practised medicine for a time in Georgia, but who writes of island life in The Sword of Nemesis (1919). Also excluded are Thomas E. Roach and W. Adolphe Roberts, two authors of West Indian origin whose inept fantasies and historical extravaganzas reflect little knowledge of American life. Included, however, are Nella Larsen, born in the Virgin Islands and Claude McKay, born in Jamaica, because they participated actively in the Negro Renaissance and write primarily of the American scene.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to reclaim and celebrate Claude McKay, but to the names listed by Bone we must add: Joel Augustus Rogers author of From Superman to Man (Chicago, A Donohue and Co. printers, 1917) - the thinnest imaginable fictional excuse for a tract on the Negro race; and the more imposing name of the Guyanese, Eric Walrond (1898-1966). Walrond's collection of stories set in Panama and in the islands (Tropic Death, New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926) is a work of blistering imaginative power and compassion. Walrond's life of exile, journalism and vagabondage, his promise and his strange failure to produce must form an important chapter in West Indian literary history but it is to the career of an even greater talent that I would like to turn here.

Claude McKay (1890-1948) was the first Negro novelist from the West Indies, and thefirst of the exiles. The two facts are inseparable. Redcam and de Lisser could earn their living in Jamaica by journalism and business, and write as amateurs. McKay, a Black man, was obliged to emigrate and become a professional. This was in 1912. In the 1950's the social situation was substantially the same in the West Indies. Although the chosen direction of the later emigre writers was England not the United States, McKay was the first in a long line. But it is in another way that McKay seems to anticipate patterns in West Indian writing. His early involvement with race and colour problems and his participation in or witnessing of the international Negro movements of the early twentieth century leave their mark on his fictions: to follow his life and work in relation to one another, and in chronological order is to raise precisely those questions of technique and significance which we have to raise in dealing with the usually committed and personally involved West Indian writer of the present time. McKay's life and career seem in retrospect to anticipate a pattern; his distinction lies in having created a model.

In following his progress from the publication of Constab Ballads, poems, (1912) to his last and best novel Banana Bottom (1933) I want to try and give substance to this view. The argument is divided into two parts.

CHAPTER VI

Claude McKay:

THE ROAD TO BANANA BOTTOM

(i) Life and Poetry

Shortly after the publication of his Constab Ballads (1912) McKay left Jamaica to study at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Once in America, however, he felt that Tuskegee was too claustrophobic and too disciplined. All that he did over the next two years (1913-14) is not known but he took courses in Agriculture and English at Kansas State College where his English teacher introduced him to W. E. B. Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk: "The book shook me like an earthquake,"[1] he declares in his autobiography A Long Way from Home. After two years, according to McKay himself "I was gripped by the lust to wander and wonder. The spirit of the vagabond, the daemon of some poets had got hold of me. I quit college" (p.4). An unsuccessful venture at running a restaurant in a tough New York district in 1914 was followed by several years up to 1919 as a dining car waiter on the Pennsylvania railroad. Giving a shape to these years of vagabondage McKay in his autobiography describes them as years of preparation: "I wandered through the muck and the scum with the one objective dominating my mind. I took my menial tasks like a student who is working his way through a university. My leisure was divided between the experiment of daily living and the experiment of essays in writing. If I would not graduate as a bachelor of arts or science I would graduate as a poet" (p.4). Three of the basic constituents in McKay's life may be extracted from all this: an involvement with the Negro question, vagabondage, the urge to be a writer. The first appears again and again in his poems, and dominates his first two novels. The second expressed itself as a profound malaise in all his work and in the roving heroes Jake and Ray in Home to Harlem (1928) and Banjo and Ray in Banjo (1929). The third he introduced explicitly in Ray's discussions about the writer's craft and raw material in the same two novels:

---

[1]Claude McKay A Long Way from Home (New York, 1937) p.110. Further quotations will be followed by page references in the text.

Dreams of making something with words. What could he make ... and fashion? Could he ever create Art? Art around which vague, incomprehensible words and phrases stormed? What was art, anyway? Was it more than a clear-cut presentation of a vivid impression of life? Only the Russians of the late era seemed to stand up like giants in the new. Gogol, Dostoievski, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgeniev. When he read them now he though: Here were elements that the grand carnage swept over and touched not. The soil of life saved their roots from the fire. They were so saturated, so deep-down rooted in it. (Home to Harlem, p.229)

We will have to ask the same questions about McKay himself later, but I would like to carry on with the short sketch of his life.

McKay's first opportunity as a writer came in the winter of 1918 when Frank Harris imperiously summoned him to a private interview at his home in Waverley Place. In an all-night session the boastful, patronising but appreciative Harris overwhelmed and inspired the Negro poet. The opening chapter of A Long Way from Home 'A Great Editor' (pp. 3-25) pays sincere tribute to the man who published McKay's poems in 1918. But the chapter is full of ironies:

Suddenly he said something like this: 'I am wondering whether your sensitivity is hereditary or acquired.' I said that I didn't know, that perhaps it was just human ...

'Don't misunderstand me,' he said. 'Your sensitivity is the quality of your work... What I mean is, the stock from which you stem - your people - are not sensitive. I saw them at close range, you know, in West Africa and the Sudan. They have plenty of the instinct of the senses, much of which we have lost. But the attitude toward life is different; they are not sensitive about human life as we are. Life is cheap in Africa... (p.24)

No sooner had Harris published his exceptional Negro in Pearson's Magazine (September 1918) than another radical magazine took notice of McKay. It was in the pages of The Liberator, much to the jealous annoyance of Frank Harris, that the following sonnet first appeared in July 1919. It was McKay's response to the race riots of the same year:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back![2]

The piece was reprinted in almost every pro-Negro magazine and newspaper in America. It illustrates the directness of emotion that is a characteristic of all McKay's verse. It was well-timed and it was excellent rhetoric. Years later it was quoted by an orator, Winston Churchill to the House of Commons when Britain feared a German invasion.[3]

Financed by a bizarre idealist named Gray (he was "lank and limp and strangely gray-eyed and there was a grayness in his personality like the sensation of dry sponge") McKay himself travelled to England in late 1919 and remained there, suffering, by his account until late 1920. The "fog of London was like a heavy suffocating shroud. It not only wrapped you around but entered into your throat like a strangling nightmare." Not only the climate, "... The English as a whole were a strangely unsympathetic people, as coldly chilling as their English fog" (pp. 66-67). McKay's capacity for being attached to movements without surrendering himself is an important fact for the understanding of his work. In London he became a reporter on Sylvia Pankhurst's militant the Workers' Dreadnought.[4] This came about in the following way. The Daily Herald had been conducting in 1920 a sensational campaign against the use of Black troops in the subjection of Germany.

---

[2]Selected Poems of Claude McKay intr. John Dewey (New York: 1953) p.36. Other poems quoted are to be found in this edition.

[3]Mentioned by Stephen H. Bronz in Roots of Negro Racial Consciousness (New York, 1964) p.74.

[4]Published between 28 July, 1917 and 14 June, 1924. Pankhurst had previously run the Woman's Dreadnought as part of her suffragette activities.

McKay was stung by headlines like "Brutes in French Uniform", "Black Peril on the Rhine" and "Sexual Horrors Let Loose by France". George Lansbury did not print McKay's protesting letter, but European womanhood in the shape of Sylvia Pankhurst took the Negro's prose and gave him a job. In September 1920, McKay was at Portsmouth reporting the Trades Union Congress.

Meanwhile, McKay the poet was still in training. In London he wrote the nostalgic "Flame-heart" ("So much have I forgotten in ten years"), had several poems published in C. K. Ogden's the Cambridge Magazine,[5] and through Ogden, his first collection since Constab Ballads (1912) was published with a hypocritical preface by I. A. Richards.[6] The poems in Spring in New Hampshire (1920) reveal nostalgia for the Jamaican homeland ("The Tropics in New York" and "I shall Return") nostalgia for a vague ancestral place ("Outcast"), protest on the racial level, and love poems expressing a sense of loss ("A Memory of June"). But McKay didn't remain in London to read the reviews. In the middle of Pankhurst's troubles with the police the poet took off for the United States again in 1921. On the returning ship he read what The Spectator had to say about Spring in New Hampshire. The reviewer was not only misinformed about McKay's identity, he was prejudiced in the usual way: "Perhaps the ordinary reader's first impulse in realising that the book is by an American Negro is to inquire into its good taste. Not until we are satisfied that his work does not overstep the barriers which a not quite explicable

---

[5] 'Spring in New Hampshire' and 'The Tired Worker' were reprinted (from The Liberator) in the Cambridge Magazine (Sept. 6, 1919) p.962. A letter from F. Marwick the following week gave biographical information and quoted poems from McKay's first volume Songs of Jamaica (1912). Further poems by McKay appeared in the Cambridge Magazine in 1920 after McKay himself had arrived in England.

[6] Published by Grant Richards Ltd. There does not seem in fact to have been an American edition advertised as to be published simultaneously by Alfred A. Knopf. But most of the poems were re-printed in the United States in Harlem Shadows (1922).

but deep instinct in us is ever alive to maintain can we judge it with genuine fairness. Mr. Claude McKay never offends our sensibilities. His love poetry is clear of the hint which would put our racial instinct against him, whether we would or not."[7] McKay passed the test but even in a favourable review the Negro poet was less poet than Negro.

In America, he could be nothing else. As an associate editor of The Liberator during the next two years he mixed with White radicals and the Harlem intelligentsia. But after a brief attempt with some Negro leaders in 1921 to influence Marcus Garvey to make his flourishing movement more class-conscious McKay seems to have cooled towards institutionalised protest of any kind. Harlem Shadows (1922),[8] his first American collection reveals that his concern for the Negro in America, and for the race, were as personally felt as ever.

In Harlem Shadows, McKay is a poet of social and racial protest, but he is above all the romantic, the poet of nostalgia and yearning. His view of Africa or attitude to it varies with his moods. In the sonnet 'To the White Fiends' he angrily threatens to out-match his White persecutors' cruelty: "I could match - out-match: Am I not Afric's son,/Black of that black land where black deeds are done?" In the sonnet 'Africa' he makes use of the idea that Egyptian civilisation was Negro but the impulse is not to glorify the African past. Rather, the poem turns on the seventh and eighth lines "The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes/Watches the mad world with immobile lids" and goes on to express awe at the passing of all mighty things: "... The darkness swallowed thee again/Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done/Of all the mighty nations of the sun." In the title poem 'Harlem Shadows' reprinted from Spring in New Hampshire, McKay's protest intention seems to get the better of a

---

[7] The Spectator, October 23, 1920.

[8] Published by Harcourt, Brace and Company.

haunting opening: "I hear the halting footsteps of a lass (In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall/Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass". For a moment, the girls' possibilities as mysterious agents are vast, and so are the narrator's but the poem ceases to be dramatic as McKay, from an omniscient position progressively declares the girls' pathetic condition. The sensuous "slippered feet" become "thinly shod" feet, and the "prowling" girls in stanza one become "half-clad girls of tired feet" in stanza two until in the final stanza we hear:

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
An heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

Protest and nostalgia occur again in the troubled sonnet 'Outcast'. This confused poem swings from the moving Wordsworthian simplicity of "Something in me is lost, forever lost/Some vital thing has gone out of my heart" to the self-pitying pose of a Byronic figure: "And I must walk the way of life a ghost/ Among the sons of earth a thing apart". In the final couplet, protest, nostalgia for the "pays natal" and the personal malaise which is the fundamental McKay experience are all crammed together,

For I was born, far from my native clime
Under the white man's menace, out of time.

"For I was born ... out of time", this is the feeling which McKay objectifies brilliantly in his finest poem 'The Harlem Dancer':

1 Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
2 And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
3 Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
4 Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
5 She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
6 The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
7 To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
8 Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
9 Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
10 Profusely fell; and, tossing coins in praise
11 The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys and even the girls,
12 Devoured her with eager, passionate gaze:

13 But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
14 I knew herself was not in that strange place.

The well-selected details owe their presence in the poem to the appreciative habitue of Harlem. The objectified dancer is an image of McKay's own condition, an identification for which we are prepared by lines 7 and 8, and of which we are convinced in the final rhyming couplet. As we will see in the account of the novels, the sense of being born out of time never allowed McKay or his heroes to rest.

The year of the publication of Harlem Shadows (1922) was the year he resigned from The Liberator, the year when the sudden re-entry of "a woman... to whom I had been married seven years before" turned McKay's desire to be footloose and wandering again into a necessity. Attending the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Moscow, 1922) the Negro poet enjoyed the wondering friendliness of the folk and the calculated lionisation of the Bolsheviks. He didn't object to any of it: "Never in my life did I feel prouder of being an African ... I was carried along on a crest of sweet excitement ... I was the first Negro to arrive in Russia since the revolution ... I was like a black ikon" (p.168). He made the most of it, but it did not go to his head. The fabulous pilgrimage over, McKay spent the ten years between 1923 and 1934 working and wandering in the varied world of France, Spain and Morocco. In these restless years were produced three novels, a collection of stories[9] and very probably part of the autobiographical A Long Way from Home. It is the novels to which I would now like to turn. My essential argument is that Banana Bottom is to the other novels, what 'The Harlem Dancer' is to the rest of his poems.

---

[9] Home to Harlem (1928); Banjo (1929); Gingertown (stories 1932) and Banana Bottom (1933). All were published by Harper and Brothers, New York and London.

(ii) The Novels

Home to Harlem (1928) is set in the group life of the American Black Belt, Banjo (1929) more loosely constructed assembles a pan-Negro cast on the Marseilles waterfront called the Ditch. In both novels, McKay's preoccupation with the place of the Negro in white civilisation takes the form of a celebration of Negro qualities on the one hand, and attacks upon the civilised white world on the other:

> For civilisation had gone out among these native, earthy people, had despoiled them of their primitive soil, had uprooted, enchained, transported and transformed them to labor under its laws, and yet lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls.
>
> That this primitive child, this kinky-headed, big-laughing black boy of the world, did not go down and disappear under the serried crush of trampling white feet; that he managed to remain on the scene, not worldly wise, not "getting there," yet not machine-made nor poor-in-spirit like the regimented creatures of civilisation, was baffling to civilised understanding. Before the grim, pale rider-down of souls he went his careless way with a primitive hoofing and a grin. (Banjo, p.314)

The cultural dualism McKay adopts raises problems of three kinds for the artist. Characterisation of the primitive Negro would run close to the White man's stereotype; the polemic novelist might be tempted into passionate statement at the expense of imaginative rendering; and the celebration of one race in exclusive terms could harden into a denial of the possibilities of life and of our common humanity.

I want to show that Home to Harlem and Banjo are not exempt from weaknesses along these lines. But I also want to argue that the novels are more dramatic and more tentative than they appear to be. In a significant passage in his autobiography, McKay wrote that it was impossible for him to take D. H. Lawrence seriously as a social thinker. Yet Lawrence was the modern writer he preferred above any: "In D. H. Lawrence I found confusion - all of the ferment and torment and turmoil, the hesitation and hate and alarm ... and the incertitude of this age, and the psychic and romantic groping for a way out."[10] I take this as an

---

[10] A Long Way From Home, p.247

conscious declaration of affinity, and I wish to see Home to Harlem and Banjo part of a "romantic groping for a way out". The life was to end in disillusion, poverty and despair, with a pathetic conversion to a scavenging Roman Catholicism in 1944: the art was to achieve a splendid resolution in the serene pages of Banana Bottom (1933) where a surer grasp of technique matches a sudden access to understanding.

Disillusioned by the "white folks' war" and seized by loneliness after two years in England, Jake Brown of Home to Harlem (1928) returns to the joyful place where he immediately strikes it up with Felice a "little brown girl" at a cabaret called the Baltimore. His exultation at being back in sweet-sweet Harlem where there are such "pippins for the pappies" (p.14) carries over into authorial amplification: "Oh to be in Harlem again after two years away. The deep-dyed colour, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long, ragtime and 'blues' playing somewhere ... singing somewhere, dancing somewhere! Oh the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem... Burning in Jake's sweet blood ..." (p.15). The disappearance of Felice is the device by which McKay gives the novel the appearance of a plot, allowing Jake to taste other joys in Harlem while he looks for the missing girl:

> ... The pianist was a slight-built, long-headed fellow. His face shone like anthracite, his eyes were arresting, intense, deep-yellow slits. He seemed in a continual state of swaying excitement, whether or not he was playing.
> They were ready, Rose and the dancer-boy. The pianist began, his eyes toward the ceiling in a sort of ecstatic dream. Fiddler, saxophonist, drummer and cymbolist seemed to catch their inspiration from him. ...
> .....
> They danced, Rose and the boy. Oh they danced! An exercise of rhythmical exactness for two. There was no motion she made that he did not imitate. They reared and pranced together, smacking palm against palm, working kneww against knee, grinning with real joy. They shimmied, breast to breast, bent themselves far back and shimmied again. Lifting high her short skirt and showing her green bloomers, Rose kicked. ...
> And the pianist! At intervals his yellow eyes, almost bloodshot, swept the cabaret with a triumphant glow, gave the dancers a caressing look, and

returned to the ceiling. Lean, smart fingers beating barbaric beauty out of a white frame. Brown bodies, caught up in the wild rhythm, wiggling and swaying in their seats. (Home to Harlem, pp. 92-93-94)

In the first of the italicised phrases McKay's power of expression flags, and in the second there is a self-conscious straining for a polemic effect. If we read it carelessly it sounds like Cyprian Ekwensi, but the passage is well-observed ("showing her green bloomers"); impressionistic syntax creates the rhythmic quality; the vividly seen pianist's transport is all the more intense for being confined by the ceiling; and McKay's tactic of shifting the focus from pianist to dance and back to the inspired medium communicates the infectious quality of the music. The passage is not an exotic tour de force: the capacity for joy and life which McKay projects as Harlem's priceless instinctive possession is the novel's central value. McKay is not always as tactful as this in his presentation of Harlem's and the Negro's rhythmic qualities. Sometimes indeed there is no presentation, only authorial romanticising as in the following passage from another point in the novel:

The piano-player had wandered off into some dim, far-away ancestral source of music. Far, far away from music-hall syncopation and jazz, he was lost in some sensual dream of his own. No tortures, banal shrieks and agonies. Tum-tum ... tum-tum ... tum-tum ... tum-tum. The notes were naked, acute, alert. Like black youth burning naked in the bush. Love in the deep heart of the jungle ... The sharp spring of a leopard from a leafy limb, the snarl of a jackal, green lizards in amorous play, the flight of a plumed bird, and the sudden laughter of mischievous monkeys in their green homes. Tum-tum ... tum-tum ... tum-tum ... tum-tum ... Simple-clear and quivering. Like a primitive dance of war or of love ... the marshaling of spears or the sacred frenzy of a phallic celebration. (Home to Harlem, pp. 196-197)

And in another jazz passage, from Banjo, McKay loses all artistic instinct to make his point against civilisation:

Shake to the loud music of life playing to the primeval round of life. Rough rhythm of darkly-carnal life. Strong surging flux of profound currents forced into shallow channels. Play that thing! One movement of the thousand movements of the eternal life-flow. Shake that thing! In the face of the shadow of Death. Treacherous hand of murderous Death, lurking in sinister alleys, where the shadows of life dance, nevertheless, to their music of life. Death over there! Life over here! Shake down Death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy. Dance down the Death of these days, the Death of these ways in shaking that thing.

> Jungle jazzing, Orient wriggling, civilised stepping. Shake that thing! Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy, perverse pleasure, prostitute ways, many-colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric, refined - eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent - the dance divine of life ... Oh, Shake That Thing! (Banjo, pp. 57-58)

Jake, like Banjo, is an exponent of the values McKay thus artlessly propagandises. So I would like to turn for a while from problems of the authorial voice to problems of characterisation.

"Home to Harlem for the most part nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath ... It looks as though McKay has set out to cater for that prurient demand on the part of white folk for a portrayal in Negroes of that utter licentiousness which conventional civilisation holds white folk back from enjoying - if enjoyment it can be called."[11] So wrote the high-minded W. E. B. DuBois. Reviewing Banjo, another Coloured conservative advised: "If you like filth, obscenity, pimpery, prostitution, panhandling and more filth you ought to be enthusiastic about Banjo."[12] Although he celebrates the unfettered joy that lower-class Negro life has to offer McKay does not sentimentalise either the Ditch or Harlem. Jake's capacity for a life of sensations is his uncorrupted legacy, but McKay also makes him a romantic spirit yearning for transcendence. This can be illustrated in the relationship with Congo Rose. "I love you. I ain't got no man" says Rose, and Jake yields like Tom Jones. The affair proves unsatisfactory: "The mullattress was charged with tireless activity and Jake was her big, good slave. But her spirit lacked that charm and verve, the infectious joy of his little lost brown. He sometimes felt that she had no spirit at all - that strange elusive something that he felt in himself, sometimes here, sometimes there, roaming away from him ... wandering to some unknown new port, caught a moment by some romantic rhythm, color, face, passing through cabarets, saloons, speakeasies, and then returning to him... The little brown had something of that in her, too. That night he had felt a reaching out and a marriage of spirits" (pp. 41-42).

---

[11] W. E. B. du Bois in Crisis Magazine. Quoted by Stephen Bronz in Roots of Negro Consciousness, p.84.

[12] Dewey Jones in the Chicago Defender, quoted by Bronz p.84.

The blistering quality of McKay's portrait of lower-class Negro life makes it obvious that while the author celebrates the capacity for life, McKay does not sentimentalise Harlem itself. (The same balance appears in the West Indian literature of the yard which we associate with the names of Reger Mais, Alfred Mendes and C. L. R. James.) On the level of characterisation, Jake stands for the best that Harlem has to offer - he is its natural exponent, but he is not limited as a character by this function. At the end of Part I his need for relief has been established: "Jake had taken the job on the railroad just to break the hold that Harlem had upon him. When he quitted Rose he felt that he ought to get right out of the atmosphere. If I don't git away from it for a while it'll sure git me, he mused" (p.125).

In Part II of Home to Harlem, McKay introduces Ray, a Haitian intellectual with literary ambitions, a man exiled from his native island by the American occupation. Two processes begin at this point. The first is the education of Jake and it consolidates what has been said above. Explaining why French is his native language, Roy delivers an impassioned account of the history of Haiti - how the ideals of the French Revolution reached the slaves - and then lectures on misconceptions about Africa and the African past. Ray next inspires Jake with accounts of what Liberia stands for, ending with the romance of Abyssinia. When Ray honours both Wordsworth and Toussaint by quoting the sonnet on the great revolutionary:

> Jake felt like one passing through a dream, vivid in rich, varied colors. It was revelation beautiful in his mind. That brief account of an island of savage black people, who fought for collective liberty and were struggling to create a culture of their own. A romance of his race, just down there by Panama. How strange!
>
> Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askance at foreign niggers. Africa was a jungle and Africans bushniggers, cannibals. And West Indieans were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world. (Home to Harlem, p.134)

Although McKay does not develop Jake's educative process further than race consciousness, the character remains conscious of a deficiency to the end. He wishes that he had been educated. In the mainly North American criticism of McKay's work it is customary to blur the circumstantial distinctions between Jake and Banjo as fictional characters and concentrate on their symbolic functions. Bone,[13] for instance, described Jake as "the typical McKay protagonist - the primitive Negro untouched by the decay of Occidental civilisation ... Jake represents pure instinct." This implies a simple-minded view of the connection between authorial philosophy and characterisation, especially hazardous in a case like McKay's where the philosophy is changing, and changing so often as a result of clarifications achieved through fictional airing. But the mistaken view begins with and depends on mis-reading. After meeting Ray's girl Agatha and admiring her poise and her simple charm, Jake becomes reflective. The passage is explicit:

> His thoughts wandered away back to his mysterious little brown of the Baltimore. She was not elegant and educated, but she was nice. Maybe if he found her again - it would be better than just running wild around like that! Thinking honestly about it, after all, he was never satisfied, flopping here and sleeping there. It gave him a little cocky pleasure to brag of his conquests to the fellows around the bar. But after all the swilling and boasting, it would be a thousand times nicer to have a little brown woman of his own to whom he could go home and be his simple self with. Lay his curly head between her brown breasts and be fondled and be the spoiled child that every man loves sometimes to be when he is all alone with a woman. That he could never be with the Madame Louras. They expected him always to be a prancing he-man. Maybe it was the lack of a steady girl that kept him running crazy around. Boozing and poking and rooting around, jolly enough all right, but not altogether contented. (Home to Harlem, p.212)

Although Jake is easy-living it is in the novel Banjo that we meet the complete insulated vagabond hero, the folk artist linked by his instrument to the improvising unconventional world of jazz. McKay gives credibility to Banjo in these terms by showing him in action and in particular human relationships. He is also true to the logic of his character and situation in Home to Harlem. There is a tentative air about the final scene with Felice wearing a good-luck

---

[13]Robert A. Bone The Negro Novel in America (N.Y., 1965) p.69.

charm taking Jake to Chicago where they will live a better life and be married, but McKay the novelist, allows Jake to follow through from his recurrent yearning, by letting him be led away in reflective silence.

While Jake is inspired by Agatha, it is from the same girl that Ray runs away at the end: "He was afraid that some day the urge of the flesh and the mind's hankering after the pattern of respectable comfort might chase his high dreams out of him and deflate him to the contented animal that was a Harlem nigger strutting his stuff. 'No happy-nigger strut for me' he would mutter when the feeling for Agatha worked like a fever in his flesh. He saw destiny working in her large, dream-sad eyes, filling them with the passive softness of resignation to life, and seeking to encompass and yoke him down as just one of the thousand niggers of Harlem. And he hated Agatha and, for escape, wrapped himself darkly in self-love." (p.264). With this passage we move into the second process that begins upon the meeting of Ray and Jake. Ray, in Home to Harlem is a portrait of the Negro intellectual in Western civilisation. To understand more clearly what this involves and to appreciate the two distinct levels of dramatic interest that emerge, we have to recall what McKay said about Lawrence: "In D. H. Lawrence I found confusion - all of the ferment and torment and turmoil, the hestitation and hate and alarm ... and the incertitude of this age, and the psychic and romantic groping for a way out." This long romantic groping for a way out appears directly in Home to Harlem and Banjo in both of which Ray appears.

But there are distinctions to be made. In Home to Harlem, Ray is presented as an autonomous fictional character. He is a figure of malaise, and through his tortured consciousness a set of social and racial dilemmas are expressed. Our willingness to accept what is being said or thought by Ray depends upon our being convinced that his personal dilemma exists. An episode in the chapter 'Snowstorm in Pittsburgh' serves to illustrate how McKay wins credibility on both counts. Jake and Ray have returned from an all-night bar:

> Jake fell asleep as soon as his head touched the dirty pillow. Below him Ray lay in his bunk, tormented by bugs and the snoring cooks. The low-burning gaslight flickered and flared upon the shadows. The young man lay under the untellable horror of a dead-tired man who wills to sleep and cannot.
>
> In other sections of the big barn building the faint chink of coins touched his ears. Those men gambling the hopeless Pittsburgh night away did not disturb him. They were so quiet. It would have been better, perhaps, if they were noisy. (Home to Harlem, pp. 151-152)

This is a precisely rendered description of sleeplessness, and from it we move into the troubled consciousness of the character counting up to a million, thinking of love and then thinking about home: "He flung himself, across void and water back home." Nostalgia recurs again and again in McKay's work, poetry and prose, and it is evident that it was an expression of McKay's sense of his exile.

> ... There was the quiet, chalky-dusty street and, jutting out over it, the front of the house that he had lived in. The high staircase built on the outside, and pots of begonias and ferns on the landing.... All the flowering things he loved, red and white and pink hibiscus, mimosas, rhododendrons, a thousand glowing creepers, climbing and spilling their vivid petals everywhere, and bright-buzzing humming-birds and butterflies ... (Home to Harlem, pp. 152-153)

McKay's nostalgia is controlled here, made relevant as part of the character's mental effort to induce rest. The author's sense of the dramatic situation is strong, moreover, so he does not let even this plausible nostalgia get out of hand:

> ... Intermittently the cooks broke their snoring with masticating noises of their fat lips, like animals eating. Ray fixed his eyes on the offensive bug-bitten bulk of the chef. These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature put them in the same race ... Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room except Jake. Race.... Why should he have and love a race? Races and nations were things like skunks, whose smells poisoned the air of life. (Home to Harlem, pp. 153-154)

Thus smoothly do we move with the character, and with the implied author, from particular sleeplessness and particular reactions to people, to larger questions of race and nation. But again, McKay's sense of Ray as a particular character with a particular past, and his awareness of his fictional creation as a troubled being are in tactical control. Ray's thoughts about race and nation dart back and forth, with his own island always in his mind. The American occupation has

thrown him into being one with the "poor African natives" and "Yakee 'coons'", but he agitatedly slips out of such an affinity only to be faced again by the returning thought:

> .../S/ome day Uncle Sam might let go of his island and he would escape from the clutches of that magnificent monster of civilisation and retire behind the natural defenses of his island, where the steam-roller of progress could not reach him. Escape he would. He had faith. He had hope. But, oh, what would become of that great mass of black swine ... Sleep! oh, sleep! ... But all his senses were burning wide awake. Thought was not a beautiful and reassuring angel. ... No. It was suffering...
> (Home to Harlem, pp. 155-156)

McKay does not hesitate to use Ray as a means of grinding the authorial axe but the grinding is done by a character convincingly presented as a man aggrieved.

The effect of such a dramatic presentation may be felt in the well-known chapter 15. Here, Ray thinks like McKay about the art and raw material of fiction, supplies a reading list of intellectual influences upon McKay, and then registers the two events that shook McKay's life, "the great mass carnage in Europe" and the great mass revolution in Russia." Ray, we are told, realised that he had lived through an era:

> And also he realised that his spiritual masters had not crossed with him into the new. He felt alone, hurt, neglected, cheated, almost naked. But he was a savage, even though he was a sensitive one, and did not mind nakedness. What had happened? Had they refused to come or had he left them behind? Something had happened. But it was not desertion nor young insurgency. It was death. Even as the last scion of a famous line prances out his day and dies and is set aside with his ancestors in their cold whited sepulcher, so had his masters marched with flags and banners flying all their wonderful, trenchant, critical satirical, mind-sharpening, pity-evoking constructive ideas of ultimate social righteousness into the vast international cemetery of this century.
> (Home to Harlem, pp. 226-227)

A reading of McKay's autobiography A Long Way from Home might suggest that Ray is being the author's mouthpiece, but here it is necessary to make a theoretical distinction of some consequence. We have to discriminate between on the one hand, a character who is simply an author's mouthpiece or embodiment of a consciously held theory, and on the other, an independent fictional character who happens to be

modelled upon an author's own life. Ray in Home to Harlem is modelled upon McKay. Because Ray's dilemmas are presented, crucially, in dramatic terms in the novel itself, the authorial urgency intensifies that of the character. It is like hitting with the spin.

For convenience we might say that there are two main types of the character who is an author's mouthpiece or the embodiment of a consciously held authorial theory. In the first type is the character whose life and experiences are presented in the novel with enough conviction to allow us to reject or absorb the insistent authorial doctrine. This happens in Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. In the second type, the doctrine dominates to such an extent that we have to give up the character as dead, and listen instead to the authorial voice. If the author is talking about something that interests us, we listen avidly. This is probably why some people like to read Lady Chatterley's Lover. In Banjo, Ray ceases to be of interest as a character in his own right. McKay's failure to realise him as a character makes Ray unsatisfactory as a carrier of the author's opinions. For while these opinions interest us as indications of McKay's intense malaise and autobiographical drama, they reduce Ray to the status of a voice. At this desperate tail end, McKay is hitting neither with nor against the spin. He is simply hitting out. He sometimes connects devastatingly, but the art of the novel suffers. The weaknesses are implicit in the novel's structural principle.

Banjo has even less of a plot than Home to Harlem: the sub-title declares it to be "a story without a plot". The setting on the Marseilles waterfront is less cohesive than the Harlem of the previous novel. This need not have mattered, but the group of international Negroes McKay assembles hardly live together - they meet like delegates at a conference for the Negro stateless. Long stretches of the novel are turned over to debating and discussing Negro questions: Senghor is mentioned once or twice and Garvey haunts the conversations, but every shade of

Negro and every shade of Negro opinion is represented. The loss of concentration on characters is met by a heavy reliance upon rhetoric. Sitting presidentially at these discussions is Ray. When he intervenes he is withering and decisive.

When a Martiniquah student, met at a cafe, refuses to accompany Ray to another Bar on the grounds that there are likely to be too many Senegalese there, Ray attacks him for despising his racial roots:

> ... In the modern race of life we're merely beginners. If this Renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it.'
> 'I believe in a racial renaissance', said the student, 'but not in going back to savagery.'
> 'Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people', said Ray, 'is not savagery. It is culture.'
> 'I can't see that,' said the student.
> 'You are like many Negro intellectuals who are belly-aching about race,' said Ray. 'What's wrong with you all is your education. You get a white man's education and learn to despise your own people. You read biased history of the whites conquering the colored and primitive peoples, and it thrills you just as it does a white boy belonging to a great white nation.'
> (Banjo, pp. 200-201)

There are another two hundred and eighty words in Ray's speech in which he advises the Martiniquan to read Russian novels, to learn about Gandhi and to be humble before the simple beauty of the African dialects instead of despising them. This does not bring about a change in the Martiniquan's life. But he does not appear in the novel again.

There are easier examples to discredit, where Ray's views are more controversial, and where there is not even the pretence of a living situation. This seems to be a fair selection, however, and I want to argue from it that even when we agree with what McKay wishes to declare, and when we share the author's passion, it is still difficult for us as readers of fiction to accept such blatant manipulating of character and event. One weakness of Banjo is that McKay uses Ray to state authoritatively points of view which do not arise out of the presented life of the novel.

Another weakness becomes apparent when we consider the passages in which McKay takes us into the consciousness of the fictional character. A good example comes from the end of the novel. Banjo signs up as a hand on a ship, collects a month's wages in advance and then announces to Ray that he intends to abscond with the money. He invites Ray to join him:

> 'But you've signed on and taken a month's wages', protested Ray. 'You can't quit now.'
> 'Nix and a zero for what I kain't do. Go locket that book and you won't find mah real name no moh than anybody is gwine find this nigger when I take mahself away from here. I ask you again, Is you going with me?' (Banjo, pp. 318-319)

Ray's moralistic approach clashes with Banjo's imperviousness to what we are told is a code only for the West. The clash becomes the occasion of a two thousand word authorial reportage of Ray's thoughts, culminating in McKay's theory of cultural dualism or legitimate difference:

> The more Ray mixed in the rude anarchy of the lives of the black boys - loafing, singing, bumming, playing, dancing, loving, working - and came to a realisation of how close-linked he was to them in spirit, the more he felt that they represented more than he or the cultured minority the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race. And the thought kept him wondering how that race would fare under the ever tightening mechanical organisation of modern life. ...
> The grand mechanical march of civilisation had levelled the world down to the point where it seemed treasonable for an advanced thinker to doubt that what was good for one nation or people was also good for another. But as he was never afraid of testing ideas, so he was not afraid of doubting. All peoples must struggle to live, but just as what was helpful for one man might be injurious to another, so it might be with whole communities of peoples. (Banjo, pp. 324-325)

The long reverie is trivially motivated, and it loses sight of the situation, so much so that when McKay wishes to recall the character to answer Banjo's question it has to come with another question: "Well, what you say, pardner? ... Why you jest sidown theah so long studying ovah nothing at all?" (p. 325).

McKay's view of himself as a misfit in white civilisation had lent itself in Home to Harlem to the presentation of a tortured consciousness. The key to that novel's dramatic interest lay in the sensed need for something more than what

the life of the boys had to offer: "life burned in Ray perhaps more intensely than in Jake. Ray felt more and more and his range was wider and he could not be satisfied with the easy, simple things that sufficed for Jake" (p.265). By the time that Banjo came to be written, McKay's position had changed. The life of vagabondage had become the only preservative value in a decadent Western world.

The belief is successfully embodied in the presentation of Banjo the protagonist. He dominates the all too brief First Part of the novel in which McKay sets the scene and introduces the tramps of the sea-front: "It was as if all the derelicts of all the seas had drifted up here to sprawl out the days in the sun" (p.18). From the opening sentence however, McKay asserts life: "Heaving along from side to side, like a sailor on the unsteady deck of a ship, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, familiarly known as Banjo patrolled the magnificent length of the great breakwater of Marseilles, a banjo in his hand" (p.3). Through the spontaneity, improvisation and unconventionality of Banjo and his beach boys, McKay suggests the rhythmic quality of unquenchable life. But Banjo the folk artist of the jazz world is presented circumstantially as a person and it is this which allows us to accept him as standing for a way of life. The supremacy of the new faith is made evangelically clear when Home to Harlem Jake is re-introduced to spell out his allegiance. He is married to Felice but has taken a seaman's job: "'I soon finds out' he said, 'that it was no joymaking business far a fellah like you' same old Jake, chappie, to go to work reg'lar ehvery day and come home ehvery night to the same ole pillow. Not to say that Felice hadn't kep' it freshin' up and sweet-smelling all along ... But it was too much home stuff, chappie'" (pp. 242-243).

The new faith turns Ray into a preacher. At one moment, the character affirms to himself that "civilisation would not take the love of color, joy, beauty, vitality and nobility out of his life and make him like one of the poor mass of its pale creatures. ... Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell" (pp. 164-165).

At another stage, the same character is represented thus in authorial reportage: "From these boys he could learn how to live - how to exist as a black boy in a white world and rid his conscience of the used-up hussy of white morality. He could not scrap his intellectual life and be entirely like them. He did not want or feel any urge to 'go back' that way. ... Ray wanted to hold on to his intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts. The black gifts of laughter and melody and simple sensuous feelings and responses" (pp. 322-323). These two statements indicate that McKay is still a tortured being. But none of this ambivalence is developed in the character. Ray hang lifelessly between the two poles, reduced to being an authoritative interpreter of Negro values, and a critic of Babylon. Our awareness of the author's unresolved tension gives an inconclusive air to the end of the novel when Ray and Banjo set off together on a life of vagabondage. "'Youse a book fellah,'" Banjo tells Ray, "'and you' mind might tell you to do one thing and them books persweahs you to do another.'". There is fulfilment in every sense in the new world of Banana Bottom.

Home to Harlem and Banjo had ended with the departures of exiles. Banana Bottom begins with the return of a native. The characters of the first two novels extracted a living on the edges of society, the characters of the third are rooted in a landscape. The violent debates of the earlier works, in which there is only a thin line between passionate author and passionate character are now succeeded by the controlled idyllic tone of a distanced narrator. The central character is not a figure of malaise like Ray, nor does McKay find it necessary to externalise malaise in the form of a complementary but separated pair. The polarised pair of heroes of the first two novels are replaced by a single heroine. Bita Plant, the daughter of a Jamaican peasant, is brought up by the Reverend Malcolm Craig and his wife Priscilla. After seven years abroad at an English University and on the Continent, Bita returns to her native land. Banana Bottom tells the story of how

Bita gradually strips away what is irrelevant in her English upbringing, and how she marries Jubban the strong silent drayman in her father's employ. To put it in this way is to make it clear at once that McKay's theme is still cultural dualism. The differences between Banana Bottom and the other novels are differences in art. Bita Plant is the first achieved West Indian heroine and Banana Bottom is the first classic of West Indian prose.

The action of the novel alternates between the village of Banana Bottom where Bita spends her early years, and the adjoining town of Jubilee where she is groomed by the Craigs, and McKay makes unobtrusive use of the nominal difference between the two in order to symbolise Bita's final liberation and embrace of the folk. But our first impression is of community:

> That Sunday when Bita Plant played the old straight piano to the singing of the Coloured Choristers in the beflowered school-room was the most exciting in the history of Jubilee.
>
> Bita's homecoming was an eventful week for the folk of the tiny country town of Jubilee and the mountain village of Banana Bottom. For she was the only native Negro girl they had ever known or heard of who had been brought up abroad. Perhaps the only one in the island. Educated in England - the mother country as it was referred to by the Press and official persons.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p.1)

The communal memory is of specific times and specific events "That Sunday when Bita played"; it has its landmarks, its familiar items and its own institutions - "the ... schoolroom ... the ... piano" and "the Coloured Choristers." The private experience "Bita's homecoming" is also an event for the folk. In the second paragraph the authorial voice glides mimetically into the communal voice. From these opening moments of the novel, McKay steadily builds up a sense of a way of life. Its constitutive elements are tea-meeting, picnic, market, harvest festival, pimento picking, house-parties and ballad-making. Its people range themselves across an ordered spectrum of swiftly and vividly drawn individuals: Squire Gensir the Englishman in exile; Reverend and Mrs. Craig the missionaries with a civilising purpose; Belle Black the village free-living maid and her friend Yoni

Legge; Tack Tally and Hopping Dick the village dandies; Kojo Jeems and Nias Black, drummers; Phibby Patroll the roving gossip; Herald Newton Day the pompous theological student, local boy groomed by the Craigs for stardom with Bita; Crazy Bow the wandering flute boy; the Lambert brood on the weary road to whiteness; the mulatto Glengleys and Wumba the obeah man.

The main action takes place against a background buzzing with life and implication. But it is more than this. Bita belongs to a sustaining community just as a Naipaul character sticks incongruously out of a crowded depressing canvas. It is because Bita belongs, and because the community is realised as having spontaneous values of its own that we can credit her fictional process. The incident with Crazy Bow which leads to Bita's adoption by the Craigs illustrates how McKay enriches the background life of the community by drawing out one of the background characters to perform a specific significant function and then letting him slip back into his independent life again. The incident also illustrates how McKay at last integrates music (a recurrent vitalising element in the other novels) into the action and meaning of the novel without signs of straining.

In what looked at first only like a charming anecdote in the novel McKay establishes Crazy Bow as the village's wandering musician: "Unheralded he would thrust his head into the doorway of a house where any interesting new piece of music was being played" (p.6). Breaking into the village choir rehearsals, he would not be induced "to participate in a regular manner ... but no one wanted to stop him, everybody listened with rapture" (p.6). The account continues:

> He was more tractable at the tea meetings, the unique social events of the peasantry, when dancing and drinking and courting were kept up from nightfall till daybreak. Then Crazy Bow would accept and guzzle pint after pint of orange wine. And he would wheedle that fiddle till it whined and whined out the wildest notes, with the dancers ecstatically moving their bodies together to follow every twist of the sound. And often when all was keyed high with the music and the liquor and the singing and dancing Crazy Bow would suddenly drop the fiddle and go.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p.7)

To be noted here is that McKay has dispensed with the hyphenated words, the impressionistic dots, and the ancestral transports of dancers and players which characterised music passages in the earlier novels. But it is difficult to resist the rhythmic re-creation in the passage. It is difficult to resist not only because of the mimetic quality of the language but because McKay's description is firmly attached to the scene and the participants. In another passage, McKay's tact is even more impressive. Crazy Bow is a frequent visitor to the home of Jordan Plant:

> And whenever Crazy Bow was <u>in the mood</u> he would take the fiddle down from the wall and play. And sometimes he did play in a way that moved Jordan Plant inside and made tears come into his eyes - tears of sweet memories when he was younger down at Jubilee and fiddled, too, and was a gay guy at the tea-meetings. Before the death of his father. Before he became a sober member and leader of the church. (<u>Banana Bottom</u>, p.8)

Because the community has replaced a vague ancestral land, and because each character in it has a specific past to which to refer, McKay's rendering of the moving power of the music needs no authorial insistence. It is not in keeping with the spirit of the passage to indicate too strongly that McKay has stealthily infiltrated a polemic point about the deadening weight of civilisation represented by the church, for our responsive gaze is fixed on the dissolving character.

Relating Crazy Bow to the earlier novels we might note that he combines vagabondage with music. A brilliant student at school, he shoots "right off the straight line" after the first year "and nothing could bring him back" (p.5). The school piano turns him "right crazy ... It knocked everything else out of his head. Composition and mathematics and the ambition to enter the Civil Service. All the efforts of the headmaster were of no avail" (p.6). Crazy Bow represents the same kind of protest against civilisation as the guitar-playing Banjo, but McKay's well-proportioned world does not admit of that protest being over-insistent nor of the protesting character being central. The value that Crazy Bow represents

is a real one which the society must assimilate. But it does not set itself up as the only value. Where Matthew Arnold fails, McKay triumphs sweetly.

It is with all this insinuated, the ravishing power of Crazy Bow's music and the tenseness of the fiddler, that the crucial incident takes place. Crazy Bow the harmless idiot often frisks with Bita by the riverside. As they do one Saturday:

> As they romped, Bita got upon Crazy Bow's breast and began rubbing her head against his face. Crazy Bow suddenly drew himself up and rather roughly he pushed Bita away and she rolled off a little down the slope.
>
> Crazy Bow took up his fiddly, and sitting under a low and shady guava tree he began to play. He played a sweet tea-meeting love song. And as he played Bita went creeping upon her hands and feet up the slope to him and listened in the attitude of a bewitched being.
>
> And when he had finished she clambered upon him again and began kissing his face. Crazy Bow tried to push her off. But Bita hugged and clung to him passionately. Crazy Bow was blinded by temptation and lost control of himself and the deed was done. (Banana Bottom, p.10)

The setting is idyllic. Bita is drawn like a natural creature "creeping upon her hands and feet up the slope to him" and Crazy Bow is involuntarily possessed. The incident does not call for a moralising gloss. The ballad-makers put it into "a sugary ditty." (p.14). The stabilising community absorbs and transforms the deed "and soon the countryside was ringing" with song:

> You may wrap her up in silk,
> You may trim her up with gold,
> And the prince may come after
> To ask for your daughter,
> But Crazy Bow was first. (Banana Bottom, p.15)

This is one of the ways in which McKay suggests the distinctive value of the Banana Bottom society but there is an attempt to use the incident in a more explicit way. We are returning to the question of how presented life in fiction relates to authorial theory.

Burning to deliver herself of the news, Sister Phibby Patroll travels the fifteen miles from Banana Bottom to Jubilee by foot. Her overnight trek gives her a decisive lead:

> So Sister Phibby told the tale to Priscilla Craig. And although she thought it was a sad thing as a good Christian should, her wide brown face betrayed a kind of primitive satisfaction as in a good thing done early. Not so that of Priscilla Craig's. It was a face full of high-class anxiety a face that generations upon generations of Northern training in reserve, restraint and Christian rightousness have gone to cultivate, a face fascinating it its thin benevolent austerity. (Banana Bottom, pp. 15-16)

For much of Banana Bottom, McKay expresses cultural dualism not by setting up explicit contrasts but by celebrating the Banana Bottom community. This is why it is possible to read the work as a serene evocation of the loved place. In this passage, however, McKay does not resist the temptation to make an easy hit. It is plausible enough that Sister Phibby should show the kind of satisfaction McKay describes - and the satisfaction derives from Sister Phibby's understanding of what is likely to be Mrs. Craig's view on the subject. But in the section I have italicised McKay seems to be stating his case according to an authorial preconception or prejudice about a type and not in relation to the individual character in the interview. The whole is re-done with much less self-consciousness and with great effect a few lines later:

> 'Poor child!' said Priscilla Craig
> 'Yes, poor child,' echoed Sister Phibby ... 'But she was ober-wommanish ob a ways the folkses them say.'
> 'That's no reason she should have been abused,' said Priscilla Craig.
> 'Temptation, Missis,' sighed Sister Phibby, 'and the poor fool was mad! What kyan a poah body do ag'inst a great big temptation?'
> 'Pray to God, of course, Sister Phibby,' said Mrs. Craig.
> (Banana Bottom, p.16)

The conversation comes close to the truth of the presented incident. And the Banana Bottom ethic proves to be a more flexible one than that represented by Mrs. Craig. It does so simply by being itself.

The Crazy Bow incident establishes Bita's natural connection with the Banana Bottom world. Her transference to Jubilee and tutelage under the Craigs is an artificial thing. When Bita returns after her seven years abroad, she is still herself. The character who is a returned native presents McKay with a plausible medium for the nostalgia expressed in his poems and in the earlier novels. Bita

goes to the market. McKay describes the wealth of the land collected in one place and records the sounds and sights of the higgling scene. Then:

> Bita mingled in the corwd, responsive to the feeling, the colour, the smell, the swell and press of it. It gave her the sensation of a reservoir of familiar kindred humanity into which she had descended for baptism. She had never had that big moving feeling as a girl when she visited the native market. And she thought that if she had never gone abroad for a period so long, from which she had become accustomed to viewing her native life in perspective, she might never had had that experience. ...
>
> The noises of the market were sweeter in her ears than a symphony. Accents and rhythms, movements and colours, nuances that might have passed unnoticed if she had never gone away, were now revealed to her in all their striking detail. And of the foodstuff on view she felt an impulse to touch and fondle a thousand times more than she wanted to buy. (Banana Bottom, p.41)

But this is not simply plausible nostalgia, it is part of a dramatic process that is to end with the marriage of Bita to her father's drayman. I shall return to this process later. After her experience at the market, Bita meets the dandy Hopping Dick.

In Banana Bottom, McKay reveals a comic talent for the first time. "'Such hands like yours, Miss Plant, were trained for finer work then to carry common things like pineapples'". Thus gallantly begins the courtship of Bita by the village dandy, grogshop customer, horse-gambler and notorious feminine heart-breaker. "'There's more big-foot country gals fit to carry pines than dunkeys in Jamaica. Please give me the pleasure to relieve you, as I am walking your way'". (p.42). With the swelling disapproval of big-foot Rosyanna, servant of the mission and sister of the church, the trio pursue their way:

> Hopping Dick turned on his dandiest strut walking up the main street with Bita. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a group of his set in the door of the grogshop watching him open-mouthed; but apparently unseeing he strutted more ornamentally, ostentatiously absorbed in conversation with Bita. ... After the first compliments Hopping Dick was stumped of what to say. He was very ready-tongued with the local girls in the market and at the tea-meetings, but he felt he could not use the same talk upon a person like Bita, and he wanted to shine. So the few minutes between the market and the mission were mostly spent in perfecting his strut. (Banana Bottom, p.43)

The ungodly set are treated to the spectacle of Hopping Dick attending church and helping at choir-practice, and the grog-shop gossipers of Jubilee provide a running commentary. The latest ballad is about the fall of Gracie Hall and one of the boys sitting on top of a cracker barrel has just been whistling the tune:

> 'Well, dat was one to fall down,' said a little-sized brown drinker. 'Wonder who be the next?'
> 'De nex' is you,' said the barkeeper. 'You habent call fer a roun' yet.'
> 'Set him up, set him up deah,' said the little one. 'Dis is one way a falling, but de way Gracie fall is anodder...'
> 'To fin' out de nex' you mus' ask Hopping Dick' said a tall black.
> 'Hoppin' Dick ain't nuttin'' said the little one contemptuously.
> 'Him get a look in on the miss in de mission, though...'
>
> (Banana Bottom, p.106)

Matters reach a dramatic head when Mrs. Craig sends the following telegram to Jordan Plant:

> 'Bita ruining her reputation with worthless man. Please come at once.'
>
> (p.219)

But McKay has more than a comic use for Hopping Dick. Bita's association with the strutting young man is the occasion for a conflict between Mrs. Craig and Bita:

> 'He's not a fit person for you to be seen in the street with, Bita. And he had no right to take advantage of your ignorance and force his company upon you. He is a brazen bad young man.'
> 'He didn't force himself on me. He asked me if he could come and I said all right.'
> '... You know there are certain things we just can't do, simply because they reflect on the mission.'
> 'But I don't think walking and talking a little with Mr. Delgado could have anything to do with the mission. Even if he's not a person of the best character.'
> 'Bita, my child! Don't try to be ridiculous. A mere child even could see the right thing to do. You have received an education to do the correct thing almost automatically. Even Rosyanna feels a certain responsibility because she is connected with the mission...'
>
> (Banana Bottom, p.45)

The clash between Bita and Mrs. Craig is successfully dramatised as a particular one between two incompatible people. From this sound beginning it develops into a confrontation between two ways of life. Instead of the rhetoric of an authorial voice, we move into the consciousness of a character seeking a modus vivendi:

> Bita retired to her room. And the more she thought of the incident the more resentful she became. She wondered now that she had come home to it after all the years of training, if she would be able to adjust herself to the life of the mission. (Banana Bottom, p.45)

With matters thus poised, the scene shifts from the town of Jubilee to the lush village of Banana Bottom for the week of festivities beginning with the celebration of Emancipation Day. It is thirty years before Great Gart and Jock O'Lantern and before the march to Independence square in Season of Adventure so we have to do with Nias Black, and Kojo Jeems:

> ... Kojo Jeems, the drummer, had a fine set of drums and he was loved for his wonderful rattling of the kettle-drum. His son beat the big drum. They went playing down the hill followed by a few ragged kiddies, to the hub of the village. There they were joined by the fiddler and the flute-blower and played and played, with the sun mounting higher and hotter, until there was gathered together a great crowd. And all marched swaying to the music over the hill, and picking up marchers marking time along the wayside, up to the playground. (Banana Bottom, p.63)

At the picnic on Table Top plateau, McKay's feel for the dialect and his vivid sense of people swiftly contribute to our impression of a known and bounded world. "First among the rum-shop fellows was Tack Tally proudly wearing his decorations from Panama: gold watch and chain of three strands, and a foreign gold coin attached to it as large as a florin, a gold stick-pin with a huge blue stone, and five gold rings flashing from his fingers. He had on a fine bottle-green tween suit with the well-creased and deep-turned pantaloons called peg-top, the coat of long points and lapels known as American style. And wherever he went he was accompanied by an admiring gang" (p.66). Contained in the Banana Bottom world too are the "Misses Felicia, Elvira and Lucinda Lambert ... cashew-brown daughters of the ebony parson. They were prim of manners, precise and halting of speech as if they were always thinking while talking that they were the minister's daughters." (p.65). It is a world of gossip and ballad and anecdote. But it is a world whose laws are framed from the outside. Bita explains to the exiled Englishman Squire Gensir that her function at the mission prevents her from dancing

and from attending tea-meetings. Gensir nevertheless persuades her to attend Kojo Jeems' tea-meeting. Under this unofficial teacher's tutelage, Bita's rebellion begins. At Kojo's tea-party Bita looks at the dancers and declares "I'm going to join them"; about possible disapproval "Oh, I don't care anyhow." Wilfully she begins:

> ...And Bita danced freely released, danced as she had never danced since she was a girl at a picnic at Tabletop, wiggling and swaying and sliding along, the memories of her tomboyish girlhood rushing sparkling over her like water cascading over one bathing upon a hot summer's day.
> The crowd rejoiced to see her dance and some girls stood clapping and stamping to her measure and crying: 'Dance, Miss Bita, dance you' step! Dance, Miss Bita, dance away!' And she danced forgetting herself, forgetting even Jubilee, dancing down the barrier between high breeding and common pleasures under her light stamping feet until she was one with the crowd. (Banana Bottom, p.84)

The roving reporter Phibby Patroll takes the news to Jubilee, and Bita's second clash with Mrs. Craig occurs. The consequences are softened by Bita's use of Gensir's chaperoning name but the Craigs decide to speed up their plans for Bita's marriage with Herald Newton Day, the local boy being groomed at the Tabernacle Theological College.

McKay's presentation of Herald Newton Day is enhanced by the new sense of characterisation and human relationships that we see in Banana Bottom and by the newly discovered comic resources. Because Day poses a threat to the heroine we can enjoy his deflation - in the way it is not always possible to do when Naipaul deflates a peripheral character even in A House for Mr. Biswas. McKay lets Day's own pompous language do the work, and he allows Bita and Gensir to patronise him. Gensir tells Bita and Herald Newton that he had fruitlessly spent much of the previous day hunting for a rare flower about which Jubban had informed him:

> 'I think I'll try again tomorrow,' the Squire said.
> 'By God's help you'll succeed in finding it, sir' said Herald Newton.
> Bita was shaking from suppressed laughter and Herald Newton, remarking a humorous expression on the squire's face wondered what he might have done...

'I wish I could be sure God will help me to find that flower,' said the squire, his eyes twinkling. 'Do you think He could help me, really?'

'I am sure He will if you ask Him in faith,' replied Herald Newton.

'Let us play.' said Bita, turning to the piano.

(Banana Bottom, pp. 171-172)

Since Day is the willing protege of the Craigs, McKay can satirise him plausibly as a Negro who gets a white man's education and learns to despise his own people. When Day proposes marriage "'Everybody would be happy if we both got married'" and Bita feels bound to accept "'I suppose we might as well do it and please everybody'", Herald is gratified and insensitive:

'...You know at first when I began studying for the ministry and thinking of the great work before me, I thought that perhaps only a white woman could help me. One having a pure mind and lofty ideals like Mrs. Craig. For purity is my ideal of the married state. With clean hearts thinking and living purely and bearing children under the benediction of God.

I know you will understand,' - Herald squeezed Bita's hand, but she felt that it was not she herself that inspired the impulse, but perhaps his thought - 'just as Mrs. Craig would. For you have been trained like a pure-minded white lady.'

'I don't know about that,' said Bita, 'But whatever I was trained like or to be, I know one thing. And that is that I am myself.'

(Banana Bottom, p.100)

Herald Newton Day is the same type as the Martiniquan attacked by Ray in the novel Banjo, but it is only within the regulating structure of Banana Bottom and with McKay's sense of Day as an individual in the fictional world that the satiric effect can be achieved without signs of authorial straining. But the art of Banana Bottom is not free from impurities: it seems to be an indication of a loss of control in the novelist as well that, by the most violent irony "Herald Newton ... suddenly turned crazy and defiled himself with a nanny goat. Consternation fell upon that sweet rustic scene like a lightning ball of destruction. And there was confusion among those hill folk, which no ray of understanding could penetrate' (p.175). The plot demands that Herald Newton should be removed from the scene but one cannot help feeling that the author is indulging a spiteful impulse. The spite in this account may be compared with the humour and tolerance with which in

a later section, McKay presents the scandal discovered by Sister Phibby Patroll, at the height of a religious revival, that Sister-in-Christ Yoni Legge is pregnant by a fellow convert Hopping Dick. (see pp. 270-272).

Bita's conflicts with Mrs. Craig and her antagonism to Herald Newton Day are associated with her alienation from the town of Jubilee, and with her increasing preference for the village of Banana Bottom where she had spent her early childhood. She spends more and more time in the village. "It was so much pleasanter and freer at Banana Bottom" (p.161). A number of images of immersion associated either with constitutive elements of village life or with the landscape impress her belonging to Banana Bottom. An example of the former is her dance at Kojo Jeems' tea-meeting. The latter illustrates incidentally the way in which McKay is able to make maximum dramatic use of the nostalgia felt by some West Indian writers who are abroad. On a visit to Banana Bottom, Bita wanders through her childhood haunts:

> All of her body was tingling sweet with affectionate feeling for the place. For here she had lived some of the happiest moments of her girlhood, with her schoolmates and alone. Here she had learned to swim, beginning in the shallowwater of the lower end with a stout length of bamboo'. She remembered how she screamed with delight with her schoolmates cheering and clapping their hands that day when she swam from one bank to the other.
>
> She slipped off her slight clothes and plunged into the water and swam round and round the hole. Then she turned on her back to enjoy the water cooling on her breasts. Now she could bear the sun above burning down.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p.117)

The unpretentious manner in which this passage suggests Bita's belonging and her exultation is best brought out by a comparison with the poverty of declaration in the closing sentences of Neville Dawes' The Last Enchantment (1960): "I was a god again, drunk on the mead of the land, and massive with the sun chanting in my veins. And so, flooded with the bright clarity of my acceptance, I held this lovely wayward island, starkly, in my arms." (p.288).

Bita's increasing sense of her rootedness in the Banana Bottom community is reflected in her deliberate flouting of Mrs. Craig's wishes. A climax of a kind is reached when with Herald Newton long banished the two women clash over Hopping Dick's coming to the mission to escort Bita to a dance. Mr. Craig wants to know if Bita loves Dick. Bita says she could love him:

> 'A low peacock,' said Mrs. Craig 'who murders his h's and altogether speaks in such a vile manner - and you an educated girl - highly educated.'
> 'My parents also speak broken English', said Bita.
> Anger again swept Mrs. Craig and a sharp rebuke came to her lips, but it was checked when her eyes noted Bita toying enigmatically and ostentatiously with Herald Newton's engagement ring on her finger. (Banana Bottom, p.210)

Moving from this particular show of antagonism between the two characters, and with the weight of similar demonstrations in earlier episodes behind him, McKay enters the consciousness of Bita:

> Bita was certain now that the time had arrived for her to face the fact of leaving Jubilee. It would be impossible for her to stay when she felt not only resentment, but a natural opposition against Mrs. Craig. A latent hostility would make her always want to do anything of which Mrs. Craig disapproved. Bita could not quite explain this strong feeling to herself. It was just there, going much deeper than the Hopping Dick affair. Maybe it was an old unconscious thing now manifesting itself, because it was to Mrs. Craig, a woman whose attitude of life was alien to hers, and not to her parents, she owed the entire shaping of her career.
> (Banana Bottom, p.211)

The passage is a crucial one in the sense that the doctrine it contains plays a part in the conception of the novel but it is also crucial in terms of Bita's growing self-awareness. The flat declaration of an attitude which we have just seen in action is followed by the tentative "could not quite explain", and "maybe", groping for an explanation, and then a resolution repeated-"Bita knew that she was going to go"-which leads into a wave of disgust and an assertive action:

> She became contemptuous of everything - the plan of her education and the way of existence at the mission, and her eye wandering to the photograph of her English college over her bed, she suddenly took and ripped it from its frame, tore the thing up and trampled the pieces under her feet...
> (Banana Bottom, p.212)

It is a much more convincing and suggestive process than Ray's generalisation in Home to Harlem that "civilisation is rotten". It is a difference between understanding through art, and becoming constricted through polemics.

After this comes the routing of Hopping Dick by Anty Nommy and the curing of Bita's infatuation: more in antagonism to Mrs. Craig than as a result of her feelings for the dandy, Bita "bold as a lioness" declares she wants to marry Dick; the shifty vagabond cannot envisage a Mrs. Hopping Dick and slinks away from Bita's life. Bita's final return to Banana Bottom in the third year of the drought coincides unobtrusively with the Revival headed by Evan Vaughan. In a manner anticipatory of Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959) McKay correlates the parched and barren land with a dryness and violence in the lives of the people.

Squire Gensir takes Bita to one of the Revivalist meetings. But just outside the church a more primitive drumming cult draws the congregation. To frenzied drum and swelling chorus the leader bounces faster and faster then collapses in ecstatic exhaustion:

> A woman of the band stepped forth with her supple-jack and began whipping the fallen leader while the singing rose upon jubilant notes and others began rolling and jumping. And when the woman moaned and murmured under the supple-jacking the people said that the sounds were the voice of the Spirit.
>
> At last the woman rose up and started prancing and brandishing her supple-jack, shouting unintelligible phrases. With an eerie shriek a little girl fell down swooning into the ring and the risen leader began supple-jacking her. A youth fell down, then another person and others until the whole band of supple-jackers were busy whipping the fallen while the singing rose to weird piercing heights and the place was transformed into a whirling fury of dancing.
>
> In the midst of them Bita seemed to be mesmerised by the common fetish spirit... Magnetised by the spell of it Bita was drawn nearer and nearer into the inner circle until with a shriek she fell down. A mighty shout went up and the leading woman shot out prancing around Bita with uplifted twirling supple-jack, but a man rushed in and snatched her away before she could strike. (Banana Bottom, pp. 249-250)

It would be foolish to confuse Bita with Fola of George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960). Fola's season of adventure begins with her mesmerisation at the ceremony of the souls. Bita's mesmerisation occurs at the journey's end to confirm her utter intimacy with the folk. Bita's rescuer was Jubban. A rapid build-up of this character whose presence McKay had kept skilfully on the edge of our consciousness throughout the novel is followed by a logical marriage between

the two. The final chapter takes us three years into the future where we learn that the marriage has been blessed, the land has prospered under Jubban's hand and that Jubban's latent qualities have developed in the new context. Bita herself is fulfilled: "Her music, her reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence and he the root in the earth upon which she was grafted, both nourished by the same soil" (p.313). In the final scene Anty Nommy has just struggled to bring young Jordan away from under the mango tree where since dawn he has been gorging himself on ripe fruit:

> 'What a pickney, though! What a pickney! Anty Nommy was saying and playfully slapping little Jordan's bottom. 'Showin' you' strengt a' ready mi li't' man. Soon you'll be l'arnin' fer square you' fist them off at me.'

In the world of Banana Bottom, life is going on.

I have been trying to describe Bita as a highly credible fictional heroine, and we have been seeing her escape from the world of the Craigs into the world of Banana Bottom as a plausibly organised dramatic process. This argues that Banana Bottom is a well-made novel. This is one way in which it is like McKay's sonnet 'The Harlem Dancer'. The inevitability of Bita's movement however, cannot fail to strike the reader. The heroine has always belonged to Banana Bottom: "'.../W/hatever I was trained like or to be, I know one thing. And that is that I am myself'" (p.100). It is for this reason that Bita's process has been described as self-assertion rather than self-discovery.

To explain the tension we nevertheless feel in reading Banana Bottom, and to pin-point the significance of the novel it is necessary to return to the acts of immersion described above. Although these are all plausibly motivated as acts of revolt, their intensity is out of proportion to the threat represented by the world of the Craigs, and they pass beyond assertion to culminate in protective self-surrender. At Kojo Jeems' tea-meeting Bita "danced forgetting herself, forgetting even Jubilee, dancing down the barrier between high breeding and common pleasures

under her light stamping feet until she was one with the crowd". (p.84). But it is the episode at her childhood pool that best illustrates what I mean: "She slipped off her slight clothes and plunged into the water and swam round and round the hole. Then she turned on her back to enjoy the water cooling on her breasts. Now she could bear the sun above burning down. How delicious was the felling of floating! To feel that one can suspend oneself upon a yawning depth and drift, drifting in perfect confidence without the slightest intruding thought of danger" (p.117). Jubban the drayman is a figure of protectiveness (he fights on Bita's behalf, and he saves her from rape). When "Bita became conscious of the existence of her father's drayman for the first time, [she] remarked his frank, broad, blue-black and solid jaws and thought that it was all right for her father to have confidence in him" (p.115). Submission and protection predominate in the coming together of Bita and Jubban in the presence of her father's dead body:

> Jubban slackened the reins, hitching them upon a stanchion, and the mules marched slowly along of their own volition and Bita in Jubban's embrace was overwhelmed with a feeling as if she were upon the threshold of a sacrament and she yielded up herself to him there in the bed of the dray. It was strange and she was aware of the strangeness that in that moment of extreme sorrow she should be seized by the powerful inevitable desire for love which would not be denied. (Banana Bottom, p.289)

The recurrent McKay experience of malaise, of being born "out of time" or of being, like the subdued Harlem dancer, perfect in a strange discordant place is the underlying impulse of Banana Bottom. It shows through in image or expressive incident. But the achievement of the artist in this work lies in the dispersal of malaise. In A House for Mr. Biswas, Mr. Biswas' self assertion takes the form of withdrawal. Bita Plant's self-assertion takes the form of immersion. Art reveals possibilities. Reflecting on Blake's 'The Little Black Boy' (quoted in the novel) Bita revels in the thought "When he from white and I from black cloud free". It strikes her as "cutting its way like lightning across the chaos of the human mind, holding the spirit up, aloft, proving poetry the purest sustenance of life, scaling by magic

and all the colours of passion the misted heights where science cannot rise and religion fails and even love is powerless" (p.268). Mr. Naipaul's observed Tulsi world is a copy of a world from which it is necessary to escape. In Banana Bottom, Claude McKay imagined a community to which it is possible to belong.

CONCLUSION

Select List of Recommended Works

A.	Michael Anthony	The Year in San Fernando
	Wilson Harris	Palace of the Peacock
	George Lamming	Season of Adventure
	Claude McKay	Banana Bottom
	V. S. Naipaul	A House for Mr. Biswas
	Jean Rhys	Wide Sargasso Sea
B.	Alvin Bennett	God the Stonebreaker
	Jan Carew	Black Midas
	Geoffrey Drayton	Christopher
	H. G. de Lisser	Jane's Career
	Wilson Harris	The Far Journey of Oudin
		The Whole Armour
		The Secret Ladder
		Heartland
C.	John Hearne	Land of the Living
	George Lamming	In the Castle of My Skin
	Claude McKay	Gingertown
	Roger Mais	Black Lightning
	Alfred Mendes	Pitch Lake
	Edgar Mittelholzer	My Bones and My Flute
	V. S. Naipaul	The Mystic Masseur
	Andrew Salkey	A Quality of Violence
	Samuel Selvon	A Brighter Sun

APPENDIX ONE

Author Bibliography

Marons, Rudolph L. C. — The Cow that Laughed and Other Stories. Kingston, Printed by Printers, Ltd., 194-. 93p.

Allfrey, Phyllis Shand — The Orchid House. London, Constable, 1953. 223p.

Anthony, Michael — The Games were Coming. London, Andre Deutsch, 1963. 223p.

The Year in San Fernando. London, Andre Deutsch, 1965. 190p.

Green Days by the River. London, Andre Deutsch, 1967. 192p.

Bennett, Alvin — Because They Know Not. London, Phoenix Press, n.d. [1961?] 160p.

God the Stonebreaker. London, Heinemann, 1964. 248p.

Black, Clinton — Tales of Old Jamaica. London, Pioneer Press, 1952. 124p.

Braithwaite, E. R. — A Choice of Straws. London, The Bodley Head, 1965

Campbell, W. A. — Marguerite: A Story of the Earthquake. Kingston, The Times Printery, 1907

Carew, Jan — Black Midas. London, Secker and Warburg, 1958. 288p.

The Wild Coast. London, Secker and Warburg, 1958.

The Last Barbarian. London, Secker and Warburg, 1961. 286p.

Clarke, Austin C. — The Survivors of the Crossing. London, Heinemann, 1964. 202p.

Among Thistles and Thorns. London, Heinemann, 1965. 183p.

The Meeting Point. London, Heinemann, 1967.

Dathorne, Oscar R. — Dumplings in the Soup. London, Cassell, 1963. 192p.

The Scholar-man. London, Cassell, 1964. 180p.

Dawes, Neville — The Last Enchantment. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1960. 288p.

De Boissiere, Ralph — Crown Jewel. Melbourne, Australasian Book Society, 1952. 432p.

Rum and Coca Cola. Melbourne, Australasian Book Society, 1956. 313p.

De Lisser, Herbert G. — Jane: a Story of Jamaica. Kingston, Jamaica, Gleaner Co., 1913.

Jane's Career: a Story of Jamaica. [First British Reprint of a West Indian novel] London, Methuen, 1914. 156p.

Susan Proudleigh. London, Methuen, 1915. 309p.

Triumphant Scualitone: a tropical extravaganza. Kingston, Jamaica, The Gleaner Co. Ltd., Printers, 1917. 137p.

Revenge: a Tale of Old Jamaica. Kingston, Jamaica, The Gleaner Co. Ltd., 1919. 103p.

The White Witch of Rosehall. London, E. Benns, 1929. 286p.

Under the Sun: A Jamaica Comedy. London, E. Benn, 1937. 269p.

Psyche. London, E. Benn, 1952. 224p.

Morgan's Daughter. London, E. Benn, 1953. 220p.

The Cup and the Lip. London, E. Benn, 1956. 256p.

The Arawak Girl. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1958. 91p.

Donaldson, Robert N. — Heart's Triumph. Trinidad, Printed for the Author, 1944. /Revised edition printed at Rahaman Printery Ltd., 1963. 175p./

Drayton, Geoffrey — Christopher. /a novel of childhood in the West Indies/ London, Collins, 1959. 191p.
Zohara. London, Secker and Warburg, 1961. 185p.

DuQuesnay, Frederick J. Le Mercier — A Princess for Port Royal: a romantic novel, Ilfracombe, N. Devon, A. H. Stockwell, 1960. 158p.

Durie, Alice — One Jamaica Gal. Kingston, The Jamaica Times, 1939.

Emtage, James B. — Brown Sugar: A Vestigal Tale. London, Collins, 1966. 128p.

Ferguson, Merril — Village of Love. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1960, 270p.

Fraser, Fitzroy — Wounds in the Flesh. London, New Authors, 1962. 189p.

Harris, Wilson — Palace of the Peacock. London, Faber and Faber, 1960. 152p.
The Far Journey of Oudin. London, Faber and Faber, 1961. 136p.
The Whole Armour. London, Faber and Faber, 1962. 128p.
The Secret Ladder. London, Faber and Faber, 1963. 127p.
Heartland. London, Faber and Faber, 1964. 96p.
The Eye of the Scarecrow. London, Faber and Faber, 1965. 108p.
The Waiting Room. London, Faber and Faber, 1967. 80p.

Hearne, John — Voices under the Window. London, Faber and Faber, 1955. 164p.
Stranger at the Gate. London, Faber and Faber, 1956. 304p.
The Faces of Love. London, Faber and Faber, 1957. 267p.
The Autumn Equinox. London, Faber and Faber, 1959. 272p.
The Land of the Living. London, Faber and Faber, 1961. 280p.

Hercules, Frank — Where the Humming-bird Flies. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1961. 212p.
I Want a Black Doll. London, Collins, 1967.

Holder, Geoffrey — Black Gods, Green Islands. by Geoffrey Holder with Tom Harshman, New York. Doubleday, 1959. 235p.

James, Alexander MacG. — The Cacique's Treasury and Other Tales. Kingston, Jamaica, The Gleaner Co., 1920. 44p.

James, Cyril L. R. — Minty Alley. London, Secker and Warburg, 1936. 320p.

Kempadoo, Peter /pseud. Lauchmoren/ — Guiana Boy. New Literature (Publishing) Ltd., 1960. 172p.
Old Thom's Harvest. London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965. 195p.

Khan, Ismith — The Jumbie Bird. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1961. 224p.
The Obeah Man. London, Hutchinson, 1964. 191p.

Lamming, George — In the Castle of My Skin. London, Michael Joseph, 1953. 303p.
The Emigrants. London, Michael Joseph, 1954. 271p.
Of Age and Innocence. London, Michael Joseph, 1958. 412p.
Season of Adventure. London, Michael Joseph, 1960. 366p.

Lindo, Archie.

Bronze; short stories, articles, a poem and a play. Mandeville, Jamaica, Printed by the College Press, 1944. 80p.

My Heart was Singing; poems and short stories. Mandeville, Jamaica, Printed by the College Press, 1945. 60p.

Lovelace, Earl

While Gods are Falling. London, Collins, 1965. 254p.

McKay, Claude

Home to Harlem. New York, London, Harper and Brothers, 1928. 340p.

Banjo, a Story without a Plot. New York, London, Harper and Brothers, 1929. 326p.

Gingertown. New York, London, Harper and Brothers, 1932. 274p.

Banana Bottom. New York, London, Harper and Brothers, 1933. 317p.

McLellan, G. H. H.

Old Time Story; some old Guianese yarns re-spun by "Pugagee Puncuss" (G. H. McLellan) ed. Vincent Roth, Georgetown, British Guiana, "Daily Chronicle", 1943. 266p.

Mais, Roger

Face and Other Stories. Kingston, Jamaica, Universal Printery, 194-. 109p.

And Most of All Man. Kingston, Jamaica, City Printery, 194-. 84p.

The Hills were Joyful Together. London, Jonathon Cape, 1953. 288p.

Brother Man. London, Jonathon Cape, 1954. 191p.

Black Lightning. London, Jonathon Cape, 1955. 222p.

Mendes, Alfred H.

Pitch Lake. London, Duckworth, 1934. 352p.

Black Fauns. London, Duckworth, 1935. 328p.

Mittelholzer, Edgar

Corentyne Thunder. London, Secker and Warburg, 1941. 515p.

A Morning at the Office. London, Hogarth Press, 1950. 246p.

Shadows Move Among Them. London, Peter Nevill, 1952. 334p.

Children of Kaywana. London, Secker and Warburg, 1952. 515p.

The Weather in Middenshot. London, Secker and Warburg, 1952. 238p.

The Life and Death of Sylvia. London, Secker and Warburg, 1953. 287p.

The Harrowing of Hubertus. London, Secker and Warburg, 1954. 303p. /issued as Kaywana Stock in 1959/

The Adding Machine; a fable for capitalists and commercialists. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1954. 102p.

My Bones and My Flute. London, Secker and Warburg, 1955. 222p.

Of Trees and the Sea. London, Secker and Warburg, 1956. 256p.

A Tale of Three Places. London, Secker and Warburg, 1957. 347p.

Kaywana Blood. London, Secker and Warberg, 1958. 523p.
The Weather Family. London, Secker and Warburg, 1958. 339p.
The Mad MacMullochs. London, Peter Owen, Ltd., 1959. 234p.
A Tinkling in the Twilight. London, Secker and Warburg, 1959. 269p.
Latticed Echoes. London, Secker and Warburg, 1960. 254p.
Eltonsbrody. London, Secker and Warburg, 1960. 191p.
The Piling of Clouds. London, Putnam and Co., 1961. 262p.
Thunder Returning. London, Secker and Warburg, 1961. 240p.
The Wounded and the Worried. London, Putnam and Co., 1962. 223p.
Uncle Paul. London, Macdonald and Co., 1963. 222p.
The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham. London, Library 33, 1965. 224p.
The Jilkington Drama. London, New York, Toronto, 1965.

Naipaul, Vidiadhar Surajprasad
The Mystic Masseur. London, Andre Deutsch, 1957. 215p.
The Suffrage of Elvira. London, Andre Deutsch, 1958. 240p.
Miguel Street. London, Andre Deutsch, 1959. 222p.
A House for Mr. Biswas. London, Andre Deutsch, 1961. 531p.
Mr. Stone and the Knight's Campanion. London, Andre Deutsch, 1963. 159p.
The Mimic Men. London, Andre Deutsch, 1967. 301p.

Nicole, Christopher
Off-White. London, Jarrolds, 1959. 223p.
Shadows in the Jungle. London, Jarrolds, 1961. 223p.
Ratoon. London, Jarrolds, 1962. 256p.
Dark Moon. London, Jarrolds, 1963. 240p.
Blood Amyot. London, Jarrolds, 1964. 256p.
Amyot's Cay. London, Jarrolds, 1964. 256p.
The Amyot Crime. London, Jarrolds, 1965. 240p.
White Boy. London, Hutchinson, 1966. 286p.

Ogilvie, William G.
Cactus Village. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1953. 171p.
The Ghost Bank. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1953. 124p.

Palmer, C. Everard
A Broken Vessel. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1960. 112p.
The Adventures of Jimmy Maxwell. Jamaica, Ministry of Education, Publications Branch, 1962. 122p. /children's novel/
A Taste of Danger. Jamaica, Ministry of Education, Publications Branch, 1963. 62p. /children's novel/
The Cloud with the Silver Lining. London, Andre Deutsch, 1966. 159p. /children's novel/

Patterson, H. Orlando
The Children of Sisyphus. London, New Authors, Ltd., 1964. 206p.
An Absence of Ruins. London, Hutchinson, 1966. 160p.

Quale, Ada
The Mistress. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1957. 303p.

Redcam, Tom /pseud. for Thomas H. MacDermot/
Becka's Buckra Baby. Kingston, Jamaica Times' Printery, 1903.
One Brown Girl and -. Kingston, Jamaica Times' Printery, 1909.

Reid, Victor Stafford
New Day. New York, Knopf, 1949. 374p.
The Leopard. London, Heinemann, 1958. 185p.
Sixty-Five. London, Longmans, 1960. 110p. /children's novel/

Rhys, Jean
Wide Sargasso Sea. London, Andre Deutsch, 1966. 190p.

Roberts, W. Adolphe
The Haunting Hand. London, Hutchinson, 1926.
The Mind Reader. New York, Macaulay Co., 1929. 277p.
The Moralist. New York, Mohawk Press, 1931. 300p.
The Pomegranate. Indianapolis, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1941. 313p.
Royal Street. Indianapolis, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944. 378p.
Brave Mardi Gras. Indianapolis, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946. 318p.
Creole Dusk. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merril Co., 1948. 325p.
The Single Star. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1949. 378p.

Rogers, Joel Augustus
From Superman to Man. Chicago, A. Donohue and Co., Printers, 1917. 128p.

Roy, Namba
Black Albino. London, New Literature, 1961. 196p.

Salkey, Andrew
A Quality of Violence. London, New Authors, Ltd., 1959. 205p.
Escape to an Autumn Pavement. London, Hutchinson, 1960. 208p.
Hurricane. London, O.U.P., 1964. 118p. /children's novel/
Earthquake. London, O.U.P., 1965. 123p. /children's novel/
Drought. London, O.U.P., 1966. 144p. /children's novel/
The Shark Hunters. London, Nelson, 1966. 74p. /children's novel/
Riot. London, O.U.P., 1966. 198p. /children's novel/

Selvon, Samuel
A Brighter Sun. London, Allan Wingate, 1952. 236p.
An Island is a World. London, Allan Wingate, 1955. 288p.
The Lonely Londoners. London, Allan Wingate, 1956. 171p.
Ways of Sunlight. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1957. 188p.
Turn Again Tiger. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1958. 219p.
I Hear Thunder. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1963. 192p.
The Housing Lark. London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1965. 155p.

Snod, E. [E. A. Dodd] — Maroon Medicine. [and three other stories] Kingston, Times' Printery, 1905.

St. Omer, Garth — 'Syrop'. in Introduction 2: Stories by New Writers. London, Faber and Faber, 1964. pp. 139-187.

Taylor, Stanley A. G. — The Captive of Jamaica. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1956. 164p.

Buccaneer Bay. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1952. 243p.

Pages from our Past. Kingston, Jamaica, Pioneer Press, 1954. 183p.

Thompson, Claude — These My People. Kingston, Jamaica, The Herald Ltd., Printers, 1943. 78p.

Tomlinson, F. C. — The Helions or The Deeds of Rio. London, Simpkin, Marshall, 1903.

Waite-Smith, Cicely [Howland] — Rain for the Plains and other Stories. Kingston, Jamaica, printed by the Gleaner Co., 1943. 139p.

Walrond, Eric — Tropic Death. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926. 282p.

Webber, A. R. F. — Those That Be in Bondage. Georgetown, The Daily Chronicle Printing Press, 1917. 236p.

Williams, Denis — Other Leopards. London, New Authors, Ltd., 1963. 221p.

Wynter, Sylvia — The Hills of Hebron. London, Jonathon Cape, 1962, 283p.

APPENDIX TWO

Year by Year Bibliography

1903	Redcam:	Becka's Buckra Baby	(J)
	Tomlinson:	The Helions or the Deeds of Rio	(J)
1905	Snod:	Maroon Medicine	(J)
1907	Campbell:	Marguerite: A Story of the Earthquake	(J)
1909	Redcam:	One Brown Girl And -	(J)
1913	De Lisser:	Jane: A Story of Jamaica	(J)
1914	De Lisser:	Jane's Career	(U.K.)
1915	De Lisser:	Susan Proudleigh	(U.K.)
1917	De Lisser:	Triumphant Squalitone	(J)
	Rogers:	From Superman to Man	(U.S.)
	Webber:	Those that be in Bondage	(G)
1919	De Lisser:	Revenge	(J)
1920	James:	The Cacique's Treasure and Other Tales	(J)
1926	Roberts:	The Haunting Hand	(U.S.)
	Walrond:	Tropic Death	(U.S.)
1928	McKay:	Home to Harlem	(U.S.)
1929	De Lisser:	The White Witch of Rosehall	(U.K.)
	McKay:	Banjo	(U.S.)
	Roberts:	The Mind Reader	(U.S.)
1931	Roberts:	The Moralist	(U.S.)
1932	McKay:	Gingertown	(U.S.)
1933	McKay:	Banana Bottom	(U.S.)

1934	Mendes:	Pitch Lake	(U.K.)
1935	Mendes:	Black Fauns	(U.K.)
1936	James:	Minty Alley	(U.K.)
1937	De Lisser:	Under the Sun	(U.K.)
	McKay:	A Long Way from Home	(U.S.)
1939	Durie:	One Jamaica Gal	(J)
1941	Mittelholzer:	Corentyne Thunder	(U.K.)
	Roberts:	The Pomegranate	(U.S.)
1943	McLellan:	Old Time Story	(G)
	Waite-Smith:	Rain for the Plains and other Stories	(J)
1944	Aarons:	The Cow that Laughed	(J)
	Donaldson:	Heart's Triumph	(T)
	Lindo:	Bronze	(J)
	Roberts:	Royal Street	(U.S.)
1945	Lindo:	My Heart was Singing	(J)
	Mais:	And Most of all Man	(J)
1946	Mais:	Face and Other Stories	(J)
	Roberts:	Brave Mardi Gras	(U.S.)
1948	Roberts:	Creole Dusk	(U.S.)
1949	Reid:	New Day	(U.S.)
	Roberts:	The Single Star	(U.S.)
1950	Mittelholzer:	A Morning at the Office	(U.K.)
1951	Taylor:	The Capture of Jamaica	(J)
	Iremonger:	Creole	(J)

1952	Black:	Tales of Old Jamaica	(J)
	De Boissiere:	Crown Jewel	(Austr)
	De Lisser:	Psyche	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Shadows Move Among Them	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Children of Kaywana	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Weather in Middenshot	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	A Brighter Sun	(U.K.)
	Taylor:	Buccaneer Boy	(J)
1953	Allfrey:	The Orchid House	(U.K.)
	De Lisser:	Morgan's Daughter	(U.K.)
	Lamming:	In the Castle of My Skin	(U.K.)
	Mais:	The Hills Were Joyful Together	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Life and Death of Sylvia	(U.K.)
	Ogilvie:	Cactus Village	(J)
	Ogilvie:	The Ghost Bank	(J)
1954	Lamming:	The Emigrants	(U.K.)
	Mais:	Brother Man	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Harrowing of Hubertus	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Adding Machine	(J)
	Taylor:	Pages from Our Past	(J)
1955	Hearne:	Voices Under the Window	(U.K.)
	Mais:	Black Lightning	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	My Bones and My Flute	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	An Island is a World	(U.K.)
1956	De Boissiere:	Rum and Coca Cola	(Austr.)
	De Lisser:	The Cup and the Lip	(U.K.)
	Hearne:	Stranger at the Gate	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Of Trees and the Sea	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	The Lonely Londoners	(U.K.)
1957	Hearne:	The Faces of Love	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	A Tale of Three Places	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	The Mystic Masseur	(U.K.)
	Quale:	The Mistress	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	Ways of Sunlight	(U.K.)
1958	Carew:	Black Midas	(U.K.)
	Carew:	The Wild Coast	(U.K.)
	De Lisser:	The Arawak Girl	(U.K.)
	Lamming:	Of Age and Innocence	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Kaywana Blood	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Weather Family	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	The Suffrage of Elvira	(U.K.)
	Reid:	The Leopard	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	Turn Again Tiger	(U.K.)

1959	Drayton:	Christopher	(U.K.)
	Hearne:	The Autumn Equinox	(U.K.)
	Holder:	Black Gods, Green Islands	(U.S.)
	Mittelholzer:	A Tinkling in the Twilight	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Mad MacMullochs	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	Miguel Street	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Off White	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	A Quality of Violence	(U.K.)
1960	Dawes:	The Last Enchantment	(U.K.)
	Du Quesnay:	A Princess for Port Royal	(U.K.)
	Ferguson:	Village of Love	(U.K.)
	Harris:	Palace of the Peacock	(U.K.)
	Kempadoo:	Guiana Boy	(U.K.)
	Lamming:	Season of Adventure	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Latticed Echoes	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Eltonsbrody	(U.K.)
	Palmer:	A Broken Vessel	(J)
	Reid:	Sixty-Five	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	Escape to an Autumn Pavement	(U.K.)
1961	Carew:	The Last Barbarian	(U.K.)
	Drayton:	Zohara	(U.K.)
	Harris:	The Far Journey of Oudin	(U.K.)
	Hearne:	The Land of the Living	(U.K.)
	Hercules:	Where the Humming Bird Flies	(U.S.)
	Khan:	The Jumbie Bird	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Thunder Returning	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Piling of Clouds	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	A House for Mr. Biswas	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Shadows in the Jungle	(U.K.)
	Roy:	Black Albino	(U.K.)
1962	Frazer:	Wounds in the Flesh	(U.K.)
	Harris:	The Whole Armour	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Wounded and the Worried	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Ratoon	(U.K.)
	Palmer:	The Adventures of Jimmy Maxwell	(J)
	Wynter:	The Hills of Hebron	(U.K.)
1963	Anthony:	The Games Were Coming	(U.K.)
	Dathorne:	Dumplings in the Soup	(U.K.)
	Donaldson:	Heart's Triumph	(T)
	Harris:	The Secret Ladder	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	Uncle Paul	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	Mr. Stone and the Knights Companions	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Dark Noon	(U.K.)
	Palmer:	A Taste of Danger	(J)
	Selvon:	I Hear Thunder	(U.K.)
	Williams:	Other Leopards	(U.K.)

1964	Bennett:	God the Stonebreaker	(U.K.)
	Clarke:	The Survivors of the Crossing	(U.K.)
	Dathorne:	The Scholar Man	(U.K.)
	Harris:	Heartland	(U.K.)
	Khan:	The Obeah Man	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Amyot's Cay	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	Blood Amyot	(U.K.)
	Patterson:	The Children of Sisyphus	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	Hurricane	(U.K.)
	St. Omer:	Syrop	(U.K.)
1965	Anthony:	The Year in San Fernando	(U.K.)
	Braithwaite:	A Choice of Straws	(U.K.)
	Clarke:	Among Thistles and Thorne	(U.K.)
	Harris:	The Eye of the Scarecrow	(U.K.)
	Kempadoo:	Old Thom's Harvest	(U.K.)
	Lovelace:	While Gods are Falling	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham	(U.K.)
	Mittelholzer:	The Jilkington Drama	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	The Amyot Crime	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	Earthquake	(U.K.)
	Selvon:	The Housing Lark	(U.K.)
1966	Emtage:	Brown Sugar	(U.K.)
	Nicole:	White Boy	(U.K.)
	Palmer:	The Cloud with the Silver Lining	(U.K.)
	Patterson:	An Absence of Ruins	(U.K.)
	Rhys:	Wide Sargasso Sea	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	Drought	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	Riot	(U.K.)
	Salkey:	The Shark Hunters	(U.K.)
1967	Anthony:	Green Days by the River	(U.K.)
	Clarke:	The Meeting Point	(U.K.)
	Harris:	The Waiting Room	(U.K.)
	Hercules:	I Wanta Black Doll	(U.K.)
	Naipaul:	The Mimic Men	(U.K.)

APPENDIX THREE

Examination Requirements

APPENDIX F.—SCHEDULE A.—CHIEF SUBJECTS—*continued.*

Subjects.	Standard I. A. Children under Seven (the majority from Four to Six).	Standard I. B. Children under Ten (the majority from Five to Seven)	Standard I. C.	Standard II.
Reading	To read simultaneously, and separately from blackboard, simple sentences containing words of elementary sounds. To analyse (vocally) such words into their component sounds, recognising and naming the letters that represent them. To build up (vocally) these components into new words.	As before, but including words up to the standard of Infant Readers.	To read familiar words, phrases and simple sentences from blackboard, chart, &c. To read a short passage from a First Standard Reader.	To read a short passage from a Second Standard Reader.
Recitation	To recite simultaneously and separately a simple school song or hymn.	To recite three verses as before.	To recite four verses as before.	To recite 20 lines of simple verse as before.
Writing and Orthography.	To form letters (print and scrip) with sticks and rings, and draw them on the slate from blackboard or from dictation.	As before, also words and short easy sentences, from the Infant Reader.	To copy on slate in manuscript characters two lines of print, commencing with a capital letter.	A passage of not more than four lines from an elementary reading book, slowly read once and then dictated word by word. Copy books (half text or medium hand) to be shown.
Composition	To answer direct questions in the form of simple sentences.	To tell simple facts about objects in pictures exhibited, in complete sentences. To turn these into negative and interrogative sentences.	Answering questions orally in whole sentences.	Answering on the slate questions about familiar scenes and objects in whole sentences.
Arithmetic	To tell at sight the number of objects in a group up to six without counting. To add and subtract up to 10. To represent these processes by figures and symbols.	To add and subtract up to 100. To count by twos, threes, and fours up to 100. Multiplication table up to five times five. To tell at sight the number of objects in a group up to 10 without counting.	Notation and numeration of numbers not exceeding 1,000. Simple addition and subtraction of numbers of not more than three figures. (In addition not more than five lines to be given.) The multiplication table to six times 12.	Notation and numeration of numbers not exceeding 100,000. The four simple rules. Multiplication and division to be by numbers not greater than 12. The multiplication table up to 12×12 and pence table to 12*s*.

Mental Arithmetic.—Short exercises in mental arithmetic may be given in the examination of all Standard quantities and should be preparatory to the work of the next.

* Reading with intelligence will be required in all the Standards, and increased fluency and expression in successive years. Two sets of reading books must be provided in all Standards, one of which in Standards above the Second should relate if possible to Jamaica. The Inspector may examine from any of the books in use in the Standard, and from Standard III. and upwards from any book or passage suitable for the purpose which he may select. The intelligence of the reading will be tested partly by questions on the meaning of what is read.

† Intelligence and expression with due attention to articulation, inflection and emphasis will be required in the recitation of all Standards.

‖ The writing and arithmetic of Standards I., II., III. may be on slates or paper, at the discretion of the Managers; in Standards IV. and upwards it should be on paper. Either the vertical or sloping system will be accepted.

?PENDIX F.—SCHEDULE A.—CHIEF SUBJECTS—*continued.*

II.	Standard IV.	Standard V.	Standard VI.	Standard VII
assage l Stan-	To read a passage from a Fourth Standard reader.	To read a passage from some standard author, or from a Fifth Standard reader.	To read a passage from one of Shakespeare's historical plays, or from some other standard author.	To read a passage from Shakespeare or Milton, or from some other standard author.
ines of o know ıg.	To recite 40 lines of poetry, and to know their meaning.	To recite 50 lines of poetry and to explain the words and allusions.	To recite 60 lines from some standard poet, and to explain the words and allusions.	To recite 60 lines from Shakespeare or Milton or some other standard author, and to explain the words and allusions.
ı one of books andard, l once tated. apitals , large and) to	Eight lines of poetry or prose, slowly read once, and then dictated. Copy books to be shown.	Dictation. Copy books to be shown.	Dictation. Copy books and exercise books to be shown.	Dictation. Note books and exercise books to be shown.
ıte simes conpecified , adjecverbs.	Exercise in the transposition of words in simple poetry into the order of prose. Very simple friendly letters and receipts for money.	Writing from memory the substance of a short story read out twice. Paraphrase of simple poetical passages. Writing friendly letters. The simplest business forms.	A short theme or letter on an easy subject. Business correspondence. Paraphrasing. Letter writing.	Précis or abridgment of document or statement showing its most important contents. Exercises in the right use of commercial terms.
rules, ivision. d submoney. bers to by a ch.	Compound rules (money) and reduction of common weights and measures. ‡ §	Compound rules, weights and measures. Practice, bills of parcels, and simple proportion. The unitary method. Addition and subtraction of proper fractions, with denominators not exceeding 12.	Fractions, vulgar and decimal; compound proportion and simple interest.	Averages, percentages, and stocks.

l not involve large numbers, should from the first deal with concrete as well as abstract higher Standard.

holars of the Fourth Standard and upwards should be required to add columns of pounds, l pence within a specified time in order to show readiness and accuracy.

ıbles to be learned include those weights and measures only which are in ordinary use

ngth.—The mile, furlong, chain, rod or pole, yard, foot, and inch.
eight.—The ton, hundredweight, quarter, stone, pound, ounce, and drachm.
pacity.—Quarter, bushel, peck, gallon, quart, and pint.
ea.—The square mile, acre, rood, square pole or perch, the yard, foot, and inch.
ne.—Year, month, week, day, hour, minute, and second.

APPENDIX G.*

SCHEDULE D.—SUBJECTS FOR EXAMINATION OF PUPIL TEACHERS.

	Reading and Recitation.†	Dictation.	Arithmetic.‡	Grammar.
First Year.	To read with fluency, ease, and just expression, and to recite 60 lines from some standard poet.	A passage of moderate difficulty to be correctly written on paper from dictation in a fair, legible hand. To write a short letter.	To be fairly proficient in the practical application of all the Compound Rules, *i.e.*, of money, and the weights and measures in general use.	The parts of speech with their relations in a sentence. Simple analysis.
Second Year.	To read as above, and to recite 60 lines from some standard poet, with knowledge of meanings and allusions.	As above; also the substance of a passage read by the Examiner to be written down from memory. Good penmanship required.	Elementary Vulgar Fractions. Practice. Tradesmen's and household accounts.	Analysis and parsing of simple sentences.
Third Year.	To read as above, and to recite as above 70 lines from some standard poet.	As above; also business forms such as bills and receipts. The requirement of good penmanship will this year be more rigidly enforced.	Simple Interest. Simple Proportion. Vulgar Fractions. Unitary Method. Decimals.	Analysis and parsing of complex sentences.
Fourth Year.	To read as above, and to recite 80 lines of Shakespeare with clearness and force, and knowledge of allusions.	As above; also a short essay on a given subject.	Compound proportion. Percentages. Averages.	Paraphrasing. Fuller knowledge of Grammar.
Text Books Recommended.				

* For the requirements of the New Code of May, 1900, see Part II. of this Report.
† To be prepared for the annual inspection of the school.
‡ The figures in the Arithmetic work must be well formed, and the examples worked out methodically and as good models for children to imitate.

APPENDIX G.

SCHEDULE D.—SUBJECTS FOR EXAMINATION OF PUPIL TEACHERS.

	Geography.	History (including Scripture History).	Science.	Teaching.
First Year.	Physical geography of mountains and rivers. Jamaica and the British Isles. Map of Jamaica.	Leading facts of Bible History. Chief events in History of Jamaica.	Colour, form, principal divisions of the animal and vegetable kingdom.	To teach a class in reading or writing to the satisfaction of the Inspector. How to question.
Second Year.	Rains and springs, Europe and North and Central America. Map of England and Wales.	As above. Life of Christ in greater detail. Outlines of British History from Julius Cæsar to Magna Chartâ.	Stones and soils. Elementary facts in physics.	As above, with increased skill in instruction and discipline. To answer simple questions on how to teach reading, and how to secure attention.
Third Year.	British possessions - Outline map of Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, West Indies. Latitude and longitude. Zones.	As above. Jewish History to end of Judges in greater detail. Outlines of British History to the Restoration of Charles II.	Elementary facts in animal and vegetable Physiology.	As above, also to conduct a class in arithmetic to the satisfaction of the Inspector. To answer simple questions on how to teach arithmetic.
Fourth Year.	Asia, Africa, South America, map of British India.	As above. Acts of the Apostles in greater detail. Outlines of British History to the Battle of Waterloo.	First principles of agriculture.	As above, also to give a lesson to pupils of the pupil teacher's own sex in any secondary subject taught. To prepare notes of a lesson.
Text Books Recommended.	Hughes's Elementary Class Book, 1*s.* 6*d.* Simms's Geography of Jamaica.	Nelson's History of England for the Young, and Fyfe and Sinclair's History of Jamaica.	First Year of Scientific Knowledge (Paul Bert). J. B. Lippincott & Co., 60*c.*; and Relfe Bros., London, 2*s.* 6*d.* First Principles of Agriculture, Tanner, Macmillan, 1*s.*	The Art of Questioning. How to Secure Attention, J. G. Fitch, M.A.

Defects in these particulars will be more severely visited with loss of marks in the Second and Third Years.

APPENDIX H.

SCHEDULE N.*—REQUIREMENTS AT EXAMINATION OF TRAINING COLLEGES.

PRIMARY SUBJECTS.

N.B.—Candidates in the Second and Third Year are liable to be examined in any of the Subjects in previous Standards. Subjects in *Italics* not required in Female College.

	Reading and Elocution.	English Grammar.	English Orthography and Composition.	Arithmetic.	Geography.
First Year.	To read with fluency, ease, and expression from approved Reading Books, with full understanding and ability to explain clearly to a class. Vol. III. of "Great Authors," published by T. Nelson & Sons. To repeat 80 lines of poetry from any of the poets mentioned in Vols. II. and III. of "Great Authors," † with correct expression and knowledge of the meaning.	Analysis of simple and compound sentences. To parse fully sentences of ordinary difficulty. Chief rules of syntax. Elementary History of English Language and Literature.	To write from dictation passages (prose and poetry) of moderate difficulty. To write from memory the substance of a passage of simple prose read with ordinary quickness. Bills, receipts, business letters. Use of marks of punctuation, capitals, diacritical marks and italics. Copies set in large text and small hand. Rules for the formation of letters (rules for either upright or sloping style will be accepted).	Weights and measures, reduction, practice, vulgar fractions. Practical examples in the use of linear, square, and cubic measure. (Carpeting rooms, plastering walls, fencing, contents of tanks, &c.) The reasons of the processes in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division explained as to a class. Mental arithmetic.	Meaning and uses of maps—exemplified by map drawing of school premises and district round school. ‡ Physical geography, formation of land by the action of water, ice, volcanoes, and other natural agencies. Mountains, rivers, and river-valleys. In 1895 and every third year thereafter, geography as above of Asia, Africa, America, South of the United States; and maps as above of Asia (especially China and Japan), Africa and America. (The whole college takes the same subjects. For subjects in other years, *see* note §.)
Second Year	To read as above, from approved Reading Books, a Text Book in History, an educational periodical, or a newspaper. Vol. II. of "Great Authors." To repeat as above, 120 lines of poetry from Wordsworth, Tennyson, Cowper, Longfellow, or Goldsmith, or any of the poets mentioned in Vol. II. of "Great Authors."	Analysis and complete parsing of complex sentences. Correction of erroneously-constructed sentences.	To write a short descriptive piece on a specified subject. To correct errors in orthography and composition. Notes of first lessons in connected composition (letter writing, &c.)	Proportion, unitary methods, decimals, simple and compound interest, true and bankers' discount. The reason of the processes in adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing vulgar fractions explained as to a class.	Physical geography. Climate currents of the air and ocean, rain dew, &c. Physical, political, and commercial geography, and maps as above.
Third Year.	To read as above, passages of moderate difficulty from the best authors, and from newspapers. Humorous passages from Standard Authors to be read intelligently. Vol. I. of "Great Authors." To repeat as above 120 lines of poetry from Milton or Shakespeare and 50 lines of prose from the Essays of Bacon or Macaulay. ‖	Structure and derivation of words. Roots, prefixes, and Affixes. Word-building.	To paraphrase a passage of moderate difficulty. Essay writing; different kinds. General laws of style.	Percentages, profit, and loss, stocks, square and cube roots, scales of notation. The reasons of the processes in multiplying and dividing decimals explained as to a class.	Physical and mathematical geography. The earth as a planet, its size and motions, with the phenomena dependent upon them, the seasons, day and night, latitude and longitude. Physical, political, and commercial geography, and maps as above.
Books Recommended.	"Great Authors," 3 vols., T. Nelson & Sons	Salmon's English Grammar. Morris's Primer of English Grammar. Daniel's History, Grammar, and Derivation of the English Language. Campbell's History of English Language and Literature.	Salmon's English Composition. Longmans. Nichol's Primer of English Composition. (Macmillan, 1*s.*).	Sonnenschein's Arithmetic. Pendlebury's Arithmetic. Deighton Bell & Co.	Hughes's Class Books of Geography and of Physical Geography, Geikie's Primers of Physical Geography and Geology, Geikie's "On the Teaching of Geography," Macmillan, Simm's History and Geography of Jamaica, Fyfe and Sinclair's ditto. Physiography, Elementary Course (Chambers 2*s*).

* For the curriculum for Training Colleges as laid down by the New Code of May, 1900, see Part II. of this report.

† Or from some other book or author, upon approval by the Department.

‖ Or from some other standard essayist approved by the Department.

‡ In all years the teaching of physical geography should be, as far as possible, exemplified and illustrated by the natural features of Jamaica.

§ In 1896 and every third year thereafter physical, political, and commercial geography of the British Empire, and maps (including natural features and chief political divisions) of Jamaica, the British Isles, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, roughly drawn from memory.

In 1897 and every third year thereafter geography as above of Europe and the United States; and maps as above of any European country, of the United States as a whole, and of any well defined group of States (New England States, Southern States, &c.)

APPENDIX H.

SCHEDULE N.—REQUIREMENTS AT EXAMINATION OF TRAINING COLLEGES.

PRIMARY SUBJECTS.